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ABSTRACT

Intended to encourage parents to help their children acquire early reading skills at home, this paper provides a rationale and recommendations for early reading instruction. Following an introduction, the sections of the paper discuss (1) the historical background of beginning reading, (2) the benefits of early reading, (3) early reading case studies, (4) teaching methods for early reading, (5) recommendations to parents, and (6) the implications of early reading instruction. A five-page bibliography is included. (HTH)

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Early Reading

Parents who want to can and should help their children acquire early reading at home.

Susan E. Moser

Master's Paper

January, 1984

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Historical Background of Beginning Reading 3
Benefits of Early Reading 17
Case Studies 30
Teaching Methods 77
Recommendations to Parents 93
Implications of Early Reading 102
Conclusion 108
Bibliography 110

Tables

Table 1. Gould's Sequence of letters and suggested pictures for teaching sound-letter correspondence . . 82-83

Table 2. Materials needed for the Doman Method . . . 87-88

Introduction

Early reading has become a topic of great interest during the last two decades. Questions have arisen such as: can children learn to read before the age of six; should they; should parents help their children learn to read. The premise of this paper is: parents, who want to, can and should help their preschoolers acquire early reading at home.

The concept of early reading has changed over the years. Formerly it referred to the child's initial period of learning to read, or beginning reading, which was usually acquired in first grade. The idea has changed to mean preschool reading. William H. Teale's definition is: reading prior to the time the child begins attending the institution known as school.[1] Dolores Durkin's studies involve pre-first-grade children.[2] Wood Smethurst's book refers to children less than six years of age.[3] All of the

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[1]Teale, William H. (1980). Early reading: An annotated bibliography. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp. 5 - 6.

[2]Durkin, Dolores (1966). Children who read early, Two longitudinal studies. New York: Teachers College Press. p. 13.

[3]Smethurst, Wood (1975). Teaching young children to read at home. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 6.

early reading cases seem to fall in these categories. Thus, early reading is defined as reading prior to first grade before the age of six.

Historical Background of Beginning Reading

The question of when to teach beginning reading stems from the beginnings of education. Educators and researchers have tried through the years to provide a single answer but there still is not agreement on one today.

Until the late 1800's, it was common practice in Western culture to begin instruction in reading as early as age two or three.[4] At first, it was taught from the Bible by the parents, or by the masters in the cases of apprentices. They had an obligation to teach their children to read as shown by the first school law of 1642. This law held parents and masters of apprentices accountable to the civil authorities "concerning the calling and implyment of their children (teaching a suitable trade)" and especially "their ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capitall laws of this country..."[5]

This responsibility was partly transferred to teachers in 1647 when the second law was passed. It required townships of fifty householders to appoint teachers of young

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[4]Fowler, William (1962, March). Cognitive learning in infancy and early childhood. Psychological Bulletin, 59 (2). pp. 116 - 152.

[5]Grieder, Calvin and Romine, Stephen (1965). American education, An introduction to the teaching profession (3rd ed.). New York: Ronald Press. p. 166.

children to read and write, and townships of one hundred families to set up grammar schools and to prepare youth for the university. The teachers were to be supported by the parents or masters of the children or by the inhabitants in general. This famous law of 1647 exemplified strong religious inspiration and stressed the importance of reading. The preamble held that it was "one chiefe project of ye ould deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of ye Scriptures"; hence all children must learn to read so that Satan could be foiled.[6]

During this period, dame schools were started, the first record of which is found in New Haven, Connecticut in 1651. They grew out of the responsibility each mother felt to teach her children to read. Mothers who for any reason wished to be relieved of the responsibility sent their children to a neighbor who taught her own children the rudiments, often busying herself meantime with her housework.[7]

Lawrence A. Cremin gives an account of Lucy Larcom who attended a dame school.

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[6]Grieder & Romine, op. cit., p. 166.

[7]DeYoung, Chris A. (1950). Introduction to American public education (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 165.

> Like the other children of the neighborhood Larcom began school at the age of two. "The mothers of those large families," Larson later recalled, "had to resort to some means of keeping their little ones out of mischief while they attended to their domestic duties..." The "good dame" was a woman known to all as Aunt Hannah, who held class in her kitchen and sitting room ... and who taught Lucy, not only how to read ("I learned my letters in a few days, standing at Aunt Hannah's knee while she pointed them out in the spelling book with a pin, skipping over the 'a, b, abs' into words of one and two syllables, thence taking a flying leap into the New Testament, in which there is concurrent family testimony that I was reading at the age of two years and a half"), but also how to spin yarn.[8]

The English school, which also taught very young children, arose during this period. It was almost always a single unit in a single building during the eighteenth century, frequently enrolling youngsters from two or three to fourteen years of age.[9] They learned to read at first from the Bible. Later materials were the hornbook, speller, and primer.

Nila Banton Smith gives an account of one child's first reading experience in an English school.

> "Come and read," says the mistress to the little flaxen-headed creature of doubtful gender, for the child is in petticoats and sits on the female side as close as possible to its guardian

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[8] Larcom, Lucy (1889, reprint ed. 1961). A New England Girlhood. New York: Corinth Books. pp. 27, 44, 98. Cited by Cremin, Lawrence A. (1980). American education -- The national experience, 1783 - 1876. New York: Harper and Row. p. 452.

[9] Ibid., p. 388.

> sister ... It is the first time that he-or-she was ever inside of a school-house and in the presence of a schoolma'am according to recollection; and the order is heard with shrinking timidity ...
>
> "What is your name, dear?" "Tholomon Icherton," lisps the now discovered he, in a choked voice scarce above a whisper. "Put your hands down by your side, Solomon, and make a bow." He obeys, if a short and hasty jerk of the head is a bow.
>
> The alphabetical page of the spelling book is presented and he is asked "What's that?" But he cannot tell. He is but two years and a half old, and has been sent to school to relieve his mother from trouble, rather than to learn ...
>
> Solomon Richardson has at length said A, B, C, for the first time in his life. He has read. "That's a nice boy; make another bow and go to your seat." He gives another jerk of the head and whirls on his heels and trots back to his seat, meeting the congratulatory smile of his sister with a satisfied grin, which put into language would be, "There, I've read -- ha'n't I?"[10]

Although reading was taught as early as age two or three, all children did not have the same opportunity or the same degree of instruction. Many people were illiterate and unable to teach their children to read. Some children were put to work early in their lives and had to quit school. Others lived too far away to attend. Still other families just didn't recognize a need for schooling.

As time passed, child labor laws were enacted and school laws became better enforced. Attitudes toward education improved. More children began attending school and the common age for beginners became six years.

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[10] Smith, Nila Banton (1965). American reading instruction. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. p. 68.

By the early 1900's, most children were beginning school at the age of six. Some districts had kindergartens, but kindergarten attendance was not compulsory. Reading instruction was initiated in first grade and it became customary for all children to be taught reading at the age of six.[11]

There were some educators, however, such as Edmund Burke Huey, John Dewey, and G. T. W. Patrick, who believed that this was too early an age for most children to be taught reading.[12] They thought that the physical, emotional, and intellectual maturity necessary for reading would not be reached by the majority of children until eight years or later.

Huey said that the six year old should be acquiring experiences and developing wants that will in time make reading a natural and meaningful process.[13] Dewey believed that prior to instruction, children should show a "personal hunger for what is read." Delaying instruction until age

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[11] Ollila, Lloyd O., & Nurss, Joanne R. (1980). Beginning reading in North America. In Lloyd O. Ollila (Ed.), Beginning reading instruction in different countries. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp. 26 - 53.

[12] Ibid., p. 26.

[13] Huey, Edmund Burke (1908). The psychology and pedagogy of reading. New York: Macmillan. p. 303.

eight would allow time for this "personal hunger" to emerge in most children, enabling them to surpass mechanical rote and understand and think about written material. He pointed out, though, that some bright, mature children would begin to read naturally at home well before the age of six.[14]

Between 1910 and 1925, the Scientific Movement brought about the use of tests and other measures in education.[15] These were used to determine how children were doing in schools and how effectively subjects were being taught. Achievement surveys often showed that many children were failing first grade because they had not learned to read. Their failure was attributed to their not being ready to read. The readiness idea was based on Arnold Gesell's research, which described growth and maturation in terms of developmental stages.[16] Myrtle McGraw supported Gesell's ideas and added that extra practice would not hasten the developmental process. She felt that the only cure to the child's lack of reading readiness was time.[17]

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[14] Dewey, John (1898, November). New York Teachers' Monographs. Cited by Huey, Edmund Burke (1908), in The psychology and pedagogy of reading. New York: Macmillan. pp. 303 - 307.

[15] Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 28.

[16] Gesell, Arnold (1928). Infancy and human growth. New York: Macmillan.

[17] McGraw, Myrtle B. (1935). Growth: A study of Johnny and Jimmy. New York: Appleton-Century-Croft.

Thus reading instruction was delayed for those children assessed as not ready. Educators felt that by postponing instruction and relying on time and maturation, more children would be ensured a successful start in beginning reading.

A minority of educators believed that reading readiness stemmed not so much from time as from the child's earlier learning experiences. The specific term "readiness" appeared in American education in 1925 in the yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. An entire chapter was devoted to suggestions on developing reading readiness. However, these were mostly ignored as they did not conform to popular concepts.[18]

Between 1925 and 1940, more researchers became interested in readiness and attempted to isolate the main factors. Some proposed that readiness depended upon a child's mental age. Virgil E. Dickson reported that children who failed first grade had a mental age below six years.[19] Mabel Morphett and Carleton Washburne, after conducting a study in the Winnetka, Illinois schools, concluded that reading instruction should be postponed

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[18] Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 29.

[19] Dickson, Virgil Everett (1923). Mental tests and the classroom teacher. New York: World Book. Cited by Ollila & Nurss, Ibid.

until the child reached a mental age of six years and six months.[20] These researchers considered only mental age, not the materials or methods to be employed in teaching reading. Although misleading, the Morphett and Washburne study received much publicity and greatly influenced educators in the age for beginning reading instruction.

Arthur Gates, however, was one researcher who disagreed with the trend. He believed that the necessary mental age for successful reading was influenced by such factors as materials, teaching strategies, teacher effectiveness, class size, and preparatory work. He conducted a study of four groups of children, in which he proved his point. By varying the teaching methods and materials used in each group, he discovered that the mental ages necessary for successful reading also varied. In the first group, a mental age of 5.0 appeared to be sufficient for success; in the second group, 5.5 was required; in the third group, it was 6.0; in the fourth group, some children had difficulty even with a mental age of 7.0. He concluded that although it is not necessarily desirable, it is possible to organize materials to ensure reading mastery for children with a mental age of 5.0. On the other hand, some

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[20] Morphett, Mabel and Washburne, Carleton (1931, March). When should children begin to read? Elementary School Journal, 31. pp. 496 - 503.

reading programs might require a mental age of 7.0 for the child's success.[21] Gates' enlightening study was largely ignored, however, because it contradicted the popular view.

Since a mental age of 6.5 was generally considered necessary for beginning reading, researchers began to devise more reliable measures to determine when a child had reached this age. Consequently, readiness testing became an essential part of beginning reading and is still used today. The readiness tests typically measured rate of learning, phoneme correspondence, rhyming, visual motor coordination, listening comprehension, letter recognition, numerical concepts, visual matching of forms, and vocabulary knowledge. For the many children assessed as not ready to read, readiness programs were developed, and these preceded the actual teaching of reading.[22]

Between 1940 and 1960, the concept of readiness continued to dominate research and practice in beginning reading.[23] Educators were beginning to recognize that readiness belonged at all levels, not just at the start of

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[21]Gates, Arthur I. (1937, March). The necessary mental age for beginning reading. Elementary School Journal, 37. pp. 497 - 508.

[22]Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., pp. 31 - 32.

[23]Ibid., p. 33.

first grade. They were beginning to take into account individual differences and were using more diverse methods of instruction. Reading problems were no longer blamed solely on lack of readiness; other factors were being considered, such as home conditions, social class differences, meaning vocabulary or experiences, physiological maturity, object discrimination, and motor coordination.

C. Evans studied kindergarten procedures to see how they might develop readiness by "enlarging the child's experiences and quickening his observations."[24] William Kottmeyer, who shared Evans' concern, believed that the city systems had increasingly large numbers of children entering first grade who were, as a group, less ready to learn to read than formerly.[25] Norman Young and Eugene L. Gaier identified social class differences and general home stability as important factors for readiness.[26] Millie C. Almy,[27] along with

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[24] Evans, C. (1945, March). Reading readiness for the kindergarten. Elementary English, 22. pp. 143 - 146. Cited by Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 34.

[25] Kottmeyer, William (1947, October). Readiness for reading. Elementary English, 24 (6). pp. 355 - 366.

[26] Young, Norman and Gaier, Eugene L. (1951, May). Implications in emotionally caused reading retardations. Elementary English, 28 (5). pp. 271 - 275.

[27] Almy, Millie C. (1950, March). Children's experiences prior to first grade and success in beginning reading. Teachers College Record, 51 (6). pp. 392 - 393.

William D. Sheldon and Lawrence W. Carillo,[28] demonstrated that cultural factors, such as family size, number of books in the home, and parents' education affected reading success.

Researchers were trying to find out the causes of reading problems. Besides the readiness factor, teaching methods were being questioned. Rudolf Flesch wrote a very popular book which criticized the sight word approach and urged parents to start phonics instruction in the home prior to first grade.[29] He went so far as to say that the teaching of reading in all of the schools all over the United States was totally wrong. He exaggerated many points; however, his book attracted the American public and became a best seller. Its strong point was urging parents to begin reading instruction at home prior to first grade.

This, of course, was contradictory to the mental age advocates. It was also contradictory to the policy many schools held toward parent involvement in reading. During the 1920's and 1930's, parents began to be advised to leave

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[28] Sheldon, William D. and Carillo, Lawrence W. (1952). Relation of parents, home, and certain developmental characteristics to children's reading ability. Elementary School Journal. 52 (5). pp. 262 - 270.

[29] Flesch, Rudolf (1955). Why Johnny can't read, And what you can do about it. New York: Harper and Row. pp. 2, 110 - 111.

the teaching of reading to the professionals.[30] It was believed that parents did not have the knowledge to teach their children to read and would only confuse and frustrate them if they tried. This hands-off policy persisted until the 1960's.

Besides Flesch, other educators were showing an interest in preschool reading. O. Burke demonstrated that three and four year olds could learn to read using Montessori materials.[31] Omar K. Moore had three and four year olds teaching themselves to read from a "talking typewriter."[32] L. Kohlberg suggested that reading was a low level sensory motor skill requiring practice that bored children aged six to eight but challenged very young children.[33]

There was a change in attitude toward education. Gates and Huey were being reconsidered and used for further research. Educators were recognizing the importance of the child's early (pre-first grade) years and how the environment affects learning. The concept of readiness, which had been restricted

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[30] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 4.

[31] Burke, O. (1959, February). Whitby School. Jubilee, 6. pp. 211 - 215. Cited by Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 35.

[32] Pines, Maya (1966). Revolution in learning, The years from birth to six. New York: Harper and Row. p. 73.

[33] Kohlberg, L. (n.d.). Early education: A cognitive-developmental view, unpublished manuscript. University of Chicago. Cited by Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 35.

to mental age, was much broader now. The Encyclopedia of Educational Research defined it: to be completely ready for an educational activity or learning experience a child must want to learn, be sufficiently mature physiologically, possess appropriate mental abilities, and finally have had the right kind of educational experiences.[34]

From 1960 to the present, increased attention has been given to the importance of the child's early years and the parent's role in fostering learning.[35] Studies have shown that children can learn to read early and that a small percentage do learn at home before they enter school.

Instead of the "hands off" policy which had been advocated, parents are now invited to participate in teaching their children to read. They are encouraged to read to their children regularly, to talk with and listen to them in order to develop language skills, and to answer their questions about words and letters. Most educators hope that parents will help their children acquire reading readiness skills.

Commercial materials such as prereading activity books, storybooks, puzzles, educational toys, and games are easily

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[34] Encyclopedia of Educational Research (7:1081 - 1082). Cited by Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., p. 36.

[35] Ollila & Nurss, op. cit., pp. 36 - 39.

accessible to parents who want to help their children with early learning skills. Television programs such as Sesame Street and Electric Company also encourage early learning.

It is still generally accepted that children will begin reading instruction in first grade at the age of six. However, some children enter school already knowing how to read. And some educators are questioning whether they might learn more easily and rapidly during their early years than during their school years. There is still no simple answer to the question of when to begin the teaching of reading. Rather, it has taken on a whole new perspective.

Benefits of Early Reading

Early reading may be highly beneficial to the child. Many educators agree that the child has a unique ability to learn between the time of birth and age five. Maria Montessori refers to this as a "sensitive period" -- a time of special receptivity to certain learnings. She stresses the importance of allowing the child to utilize the sensitive periods, for they are transitory in nature and once gone, cannot be recaptured.[36]

Glenn Doman explains this "critical period" in relation to the brain's growth. "From conception on, the human brain grows at an explosive rate which is continually on a descending scale ... When the child is five, the growth of the brain is 80% complete."[37] He says that during this time of fantastic growth, the brain is an open door to all information, which the child takes in without any conscious effort.

The child shows an evident capacity to master language during the first five years of life. Doman points out that every normal child learns virtually an entire language

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[36] Stevens, George L. and Orem, R. C. (1968). Montessori and early learning, in The case for early reading. St. Louis, MO: Warren H. Green, Inc. pp. 79 - 89.

[37] Doman, Glenn (1964). How to teach your baby to read. New York: Random House. p. 32.

between the ages of one and five. Some children learn two or more languages. Doman knew a nine year old who was fluent in nine.[38] Little children learn language without visible effort and without any formal training. All that is required is adequate exposure at the appropriate time.

George L. Stevens and R. C. Orem say that the ability to master language during the first five years is proof that children possess intelligence of a very high order. They have the ability to learn complex systems of symbols and they do it easily and rapidly.[39] Their ability begins to decline, however, at approximately age six, and by their teens, most children find the acquisition of language very difficult. This is seen in students who struggle through language courses in high school and in college.

According to Masaru Ibuka, a child of eight years will have difficulty learning language and other skills, if not exposed to them during the early years. Ibuka gives an account of Kamala and Amala, two girls found living in a wolf cave near Calcutta, India in 1920. The missionary couple who discovered them tried to teach them human mannerisms but had little success; the girls persistently

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[38] Doman, op. cit., p. 50.

[39] Stevens, George L. and Orem, R. C. (1968). The case for early reading. St. Louis, MO: Warren H. Green, Inc. p. 8.

behaved as wolves. Amala, who was about one and a half years old when found, did start to babble such words as "boo" within two months; but she died within a year. Kamala, who was about eight years old when found, lived for nine years. However, her IQ remained that of a three year old child and her vocabulary never exceeded forty-five words.[40]

Some educators believe that reading is very similar to spoken language and can be learned in the same natural fashion. Arthur Gates made this point in 1954:

> Psychologically there is little difference between learning, as it were, to "read" spoken words and learning to read printed words. Spoken words come to the child through sound waves and printed words through light waves. The main reason they learn to understand spoken words first is merely that it is more convenient for parents and others to use them than to present printed materials.[41]

Charles C. Fries says basically the same thing:

> The process of receiving a message through "talk" is a responding to the language signals of his native language code -- language signals that make their contact with his nervous system by sound vibrations through the ear. The process of getting the same message (the same meanings) by "reading" is a responding

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[40] Ibuka, Masaru (1977). Kindergarten is too late! New York: Simon and Schuster. pp. 50 - 51.

[41] Betts, Emmett Albert, Dolch, E. W., Gates, Arthur I., and Russell, David H. (1954, October). Unsolved problems in reading: A symposium. Elementary English, 31. pp. 325 - 338.

> to the same set of language signals of the same language code, but language signals that make their contact with his nervous system by light vibrations through the eye. The message is the same; the language code is the same; the language signals are the same for both "talking" and "reading." The only essential difference here is the fact that in "talk" the means of connection to the human nervous system consists of patterns of sound waves stimulating nerves in the ear, but in "reading" the means of connection to the human nervous system consists of patterns of graphic shapes stimulating nerves in the eye.[42]

Thus, if children were exposed to printed materials during their early years in the same manner as they are to spoken words, they could learn to read as easily and naturally as they learn to speak. Stevens and Orem add that children could learn to communicate through any of the three major sensory systems: visual, auditory, or tactile.[43] Braille or sign language could be learned as easily and naturally as oral language. All that is necessary is adequate exposure at the appropriate time.

Early reading can prevent a child from having reading problems at school. A disturbingly high percentage of normal children have great difficulty in learning to read at school. In fact, this is considered a national problem.

Stevens and Orem present the following figures: 25% to 35% of first grade children, or one out of every three,

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[42] Fries, Charles C. (1962). Linguistics and reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. p. 119.

[43] Stevens & Orem, op. cit., p. 31.

on a national average fail to pass first grade because of reading problems; 20% to 30% of junior or senior high school students have difficulty reading the required books for their grade level; in some high schools, 30% of the students are below the sixth grade level in reading achievement; another record estimates 75% of the school population as reading below grade levels.[44]

Early readers do not seem to encounter reading problems in school. On the contrary, Durkin found that early readers had a lead over their classmates of the same mental age and that they maintained their lead even after six years. Some of the early readers did so well as to be double-promoted.[45]

In a study done in the Denver, Colorado schools, Joseph B. Brzeinski found that early readers displayed a lead over non-early readers but lost their early advantage and scored similarly to the non-early readers when adjusted instruction did not follow in their subsequent years.[46] The early readers did not display reading problems; they merely lost

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[44] Stevens & Orem, op. cit., pp. 49 - 50.

[45] Durkin, op. cit., pp. 133 - 134.

[46] Brzeinski, Joseph B. (n.d.). Summary report of the effectiveness of teaching reading in the Denver public schools, Cooperative Research Project No. 5-0371. Denver, CO: Denver Public Schools. Cited by Ollila, Lloyd O., in Pros and cons of teaching reading to four- and five-year-olds, in book by Robert C. Aukerman (Ed.) (1972). Some persistent questions on beginning reading. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp. 53 - 61.

their lead when instruction was not adjusted to their individual needs. In another study, Durkin concluded that earlier starts in reading are meaningless if schools are unwilling to alter instruction in the following years.[47] Though early readers may not maintain a lead over non-early readers, they do not experience reading problems in school.

Early reading may especially help the lower IQ child or the child with learning problems. In Durkin's California study, IQs of the early readers ranged from 91 to 161. Fifteen of the children had IQs of 120 or less. A comparison of predicted and obtained grade-level scores showed that all of these fifteen early readers achieved at a higher level than would have been predicted on the basis of their intelligence. The less bright children among the early readers seemed to be more successful in maintaining their lead over non-early readers of comparable intelligence. Durkin believes that the earlier start in reading was of special value to them because it gave them a longer amount of time to make advancements in their achievement. With the additional time, more opportunities were available for repetition and for practice, which might be exactly what the less bright child needs to achieve at a maximal level.[48]

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[47]Durkin, Dolores (1974-1975). A six year study of children who learned to read in school at the age of four. Reading Research Quarterly, 10 (1). pp. 11 - 61.

[48]Durkin (1966), op. cit., pp. 34 - 40.

Toni Gould came to the same conclusion in her work with children who had severe learning problems. Bobby, age four and one-half, was a very restless child who had perceptual problems. After seven sessions, he still could not identify any of three letters. Gould worked with him one hour each week for two years. By the time he entered first grade, he was reading words. The early reading instruction had helped him to overcome his learning problem and meet with success in school.[49]

Another child, Robin, was also very restless and also had perceptual problems. Gould gave her early reading instruction; but, at first, her progress was very slow. It took Robin ten months to learn nine letters. But then, it took her only three months to learn the next fifteen. Once Robin knew the sound-letter correspondences, she progressed rapidly in reading. During the summer prior to first grade, Robin was reading an average of ten library books per week. After Robin entered the first grade, her teacher expressed surprise that Robin showed no signs of a perceptual problem in reading but that she could not learn number symbols and had great difficulty in math. Gould says that if simple maturation had been the solution to Robin's problem, the learning of numbers would have occurred quickly

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[49] Gould, Toni S. (1976). Home guide to early reading. New York: Walker and Co. pp. 34 - 38, 152 - 153.

in first grade. Robin had needed the same kind of early help in math that she had received in reading.[50]

Early reading may lead to increased knowledge and higher intelligence. Lewis M. Terman gives an example of Martha, who was taught early reading by her father between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six months.[51] Martha had been a normal baby mentally and physically. Her progress in talking and walking was neither more rapid nor slower than the average child. Yet her progress in school was superior. At twelve years and eight months, she was working in the ninth grade, two years higher than her age level, and she had an IQ of 139.[52]

Terman adds that of Martha's two older brothers, the first one, John, also had early mind training. At the age of ten, he was working in school two years beyond his age level and had an IQ of 172. The other boy did not receive any such mind stimulation, because the father was fully occupied with professional duties during this child's early

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[50]Gould, op. cit., pp. 39 - 41.

[51]Terman, Lewis M. (1918, September). An experiment in infant education. The Journal of Applied Psychology, 2 (3). pp. 219 - 228.

[52]Burks, Barbara Stoddard, Jensen, Dortha Williams, and Terman, Lewis M. (1930). The promise of youth -- Follow-up studies of a thousand gifted children, in Lewis M. Terman (Ed.), Genetic studies of genius, 3. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. pp. 248 - 252.

years. This boy was doing average work in school and had average intelligence. Terman says that "It is interesting to conjecture to what extent the precocity of John and Martha was due to the educational stimulation they received and to what extent the average condition of the other child was the result of the omission of such stimulation."[53]

The following group studies of exceptional people show a high percentage of early readers: Of 37 gifted children studied by Eunice H. Price, 28 of them, or 76%, were already reading when they entered first grade.[54] In a study of "reading autobiographies" collected from 54 junior high school students with IQs of 120 or higher, Ruth Strang reported that approximately half had learned to read at five years old or younger.[55] In a study of 50 superior readers among college freshmen, Lawrence M. Kasdon found that 27 of them, or 54%, read before entering first grade. Nine of them, or 18%, could not remember when they learned to read.[56] Of 552 gifted subjects studied by Lewis M. Terman, approximately

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[53]Terman (1918, September), op. cit., pp. 219 - 220.

[54]Price, Eunice H. (1976, October). How thirty-seven gifted children learned to read. Reading Teacher, 30 (1). pp. 44 - 48.

[55]Strang, Ruth (1954). Reading development for gifted children. Elementary English, 31. pp. 35 - 40.

[56]Kasdon, Lawrence M. (1958, December). Early reading background of some superior readers among college freshmen. Journal of Educational Research, 52 (4). pp. 151 - 153.

45% learned to read before starting school. Terman says that at least 113, or 20.5%, of the 552 children learned to read before the age of five; 34, or 6.1%, before four; and 9, or 1.6%, before three.[57] In a study of children above 180 IQ, Leta Hollingworth gives case studies of 12 highly gifted children, all of whom were early readers.[58]

There is also other evidence which shows that a high percentage of exceptional people were early readers. It may be argued that they learned to read early because they were endowed with superior intelligence; yet their early reading ability may have enabled them to become superior. Terman's case study of Martha particularly suggests this possibility.

Early reading can be acquired more naturally and easily at home than reading can be taught in school. Ronald Wardhaugh,[59] Kenneth Hoskisson,[60] and Sara W. Lundsteen[61]

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[57] Terman, Lewis M. (1925). Mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children. Genetic studies of genius, 1. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. pp. 271 - 272.

[58] Hollingworth, Leta (1942). Children above 180 IQ. New York: World Book Co. pp. 69 - 223.

[59] Wardhaugh, Ronald (1971, Fall). Theories of language acquisition in relation to beginning reading instruction. Reading Research Quarterly, 7 (1). pp. 168 - 194.

[60] Hoskisson, Kenneth (1974, February). Should parents teach their children to read? Elementary English, 51. pp. 295 - 299.

[61] Lundsteen, Sara W. (1977, January). On developmental relations between language-learning and reading. Elementary School Journal, 77 (3). pp. 192 - 203.

make some interesting comparisons between language acquisition and reading.

Language acquisition has no conscious beginning; it is acquired gradually, over years. Reading instruction is introduced abruptly, which is sometimes traumatic to children.

There is little anxiety manifested in the process of learning to talk. But there may be anxiety in the child, parent, and teacher in the process of learning to read.

Children are not blamed when they fail to acquire language; rather, they are given special help. However, children are sometimes blamed for failure in reading.

Language is learned informally and unconsciously from a wide range of stimuli. Reading instruction is very formal and deliberate.

Rewards for speaking are obvious and immediate; speaking results in answers, attention, or other tangible benefits. Internal benefits from learning to read may appear to be distant and abstract to a child.

Parents, by making the learning conditions for reading more similar to those of language acquisition, can enable their children to acquire reading more pleasantly and easily at home during the early years.

R. Barker Bausell and Carole R. Bausell offer these arguments for teaching early reading at home: A child taught at home obviously receives more instruction than a child not taught at home. A child taught one-to-one by a parent, or possibly both parents at the same time, is receiving instruction in the smallest class size yet invented. A child taught by the parents is naturally instilled (motivated) with the importance of learning.[62]

Joan Beck[63] and Miles Tinker[64] point out that parents are the first and most important teachers the child will ever have. Nancy Larrick says that "parents are the major influence in a child's development as a reader."[65] Parents can use their important role not only to help the child acquire reading but to acquire a love for reading as well.

To sum up, early reading is beneficial for the following reasons: Children have a special aptitude for learning

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[62]Bausell, R. Barker and Bausell, Carole R. (1979, April). Parental teaching: Has the panacea been right under our noses? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco, CA. 13 pp.

[63]Beck, Joan (1967). How to raise a brighter child: The case for early learning. New York: Trident Press. p. 2.

[64]Tinker, Miles A. (1971). Preparing your child for reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. p. 1.

[65]Larrick, Nancy (1975). A parent's guide to children's reading (4th ed.). Garden City, NY: Doubleday. p. 3.

during the early years. They also have an evident capacity to master language, and reading is a form of language. Early reading can prevent reading problems from occurring at school; it can especially help the lower IQ child and the child with learning problems. It may help to create increased knowledge and higher IQ. Reading can be acquired more easily at home during the early years than it can be acquired at school. And parents, being the first and most important teachers, influence their child's reading more than anyone else.

Case Studies

Studies exist of children who learned to read early at home, in school settings such as nursery school,[66] Montessori, and kindergarten,[67] and in experimental laboratory settings.[68] The ones included here will concentrate chiefly on those children who learned to read early at home.

Martha

One of the earliest records of an early reader is that of Martha by Lewis M. Terman in 1918.[69] Martha's father was a lawyer; her mother was a teacher before marriage. It was the father who taught Martha to read. He said that he had no knowledge of educational methods and was "compelled to rely upon such crude expedients, in lieu of methods, as might suggest themselves to a lay mind."[70] Despite this fact, Martha learned to read between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six months.

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[66] Fowler, William (1965). A study of process and method in three-year-old twins and triplets learning to read. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 72. pp. 3 - 89. Cited by Smethurst, Wood (1975). Teaching young children to read at home. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 49.

[67] Durkin (1974-1975), op. cit., pp. 11 - 61.

[68] Pines, Maya (1963, May). How three-year-olds teach themselves to read -- and love it. Harper's Magazine, 226. pp. 58 - 64.

[69] Terman (1918, September), op. cit., pp. 219 - 228.

[70] Ibid., p. 221.

The father said that Martha was a normal baby mentally and physically and that her progress in talking and walking was neither more rapid nor slower than the average child. He tried to teach her the capital letters when she was fourteen months old. However, her progress was so slow and disheartening that he dropped the experiment. She began showing an interest in picture books when she was about nineteen months old and he took up the experiment again. He said that from this time on, her mental development was rapid.

By the age of nineteen months and thirteen days, Martha was able to recognize and pronounce all of the capital letters. At twenty months, she knew both small and capital letters thoroughly. When she was twenty-one months and ten days old, she began reading from a home-made primer. She had a reading vocabulary of thirty-five words. By twenty-three months, she began to experience evident pleasure when she read. At twenty-four months, she had a reading vocabulary of over two hundred words. At twenty-six and one-half months, her reading vocabulary was over seven hundred words and she was reading her fifth primer.

Martha's father used the sight word approach to teach her, amidst ingenious games that provided an incentive for learning. Materials he used were picture books, cards upon which he made letters and words, and a home-made primer. He

felt that the print in regular primers was too small and the reading material inappropriate for a child Martha's age. Martha received much praise for each accomplishment from both parents and an aunt. At times she was applauded, cheered, or playfully tossed up into the air for reading.

Terman followed Martha's case up until the time she was twelve years and eight months old. At this time she was working in the ninth grade, two years higher than her age level and she had an IQ of 139. Her main interest was reading, in which she was considered to be superior. Her ambition was to be an authoress. She had not exhibited any learning or social problems in school. Terman said there was no evidence that her early training had harmed her.[71]

The early reading may have benefited Martha. Her father had not considered her to be above average as a baby. Her early reading may have helped her to become a superior person of high intelligence.

As mentioned on pages 24 and 25 of this paper, Martha had two older brothers, one of whom also had received early instruction; and he, too, became a superior student in school. The other brother who had not received early instruction was doing average work in school.

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[71]Burks, Jensen, & Terman (1930), op. cit., pp. 248 - 252.

Tom

Irving H. Anderson and Walter F. Dearborn report the case of a very bright early reader named Tom.[72] He was said to be "reading everything" at four years and nine months old. His mental age at this time was 8.0 and his IQ was 168.

His grandmother had a theory of reading to children when they were but a few months old thus capturing their natural curiosity; she had thus produced several precocious children. Except for reading to Tom from an early age, no other information was given regarding how he acquired early reading.

Cindy

Mayme Cohan, a former primary-grade teacher, relates how Cindy, aged two and a half, learned to read forty words in a relatively short time.[73] According to Cohan, Cindy's motor and language development paralleled that of the average child. And her personality was typical of any two and a half year old.

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[72] Anderson, Irving H. and Dearborn, Walter F. (1952). The psychology of teaching reading. New York: Ronald Press. pp. 61 - 62.

[73] Cohan, Mayme (1961, November). Two and a half and reading. Elementary English, 38 (7). pp. 506 - 508, 517.

Cindy's request for her "own words" led the author to make some for her. She began on the first day with "baby" and "Cindy" printed in one-half inch letters on either side of a blank four by six inch card. The child seemed to discriminate between them immediately and still remembered them the following morning.

Cohan then presented two words each day for a period of two weeks. Only words were chosen that had considerable meaning to the child and were related to her experiences. A few of them were suggested by Cindy herself. She learned twenty-nine words during this two-week period. The author says that it is doubtful that she would have learned so easily if the words had been relatively remote from her experiences. Cindy then lost interest in the reading game, and it was discontinued for a time.

Approximately six weeks after the start of the program, an attempt was made to determine whether Cindy could recall any of the words. She succeeded in recalling all of them with only two or three errors which she corrected herself. Additional words were then presented at the rate of two per day and Cindy learned these with some of her original enthusiasm. Her reading vocabulary increased to thirty-seven words.

A scrapbook was then started, which contained simple sentences made up from words Cindy knew and pictures to

illustrate them. However, Cindy was not interested in reading from it. She learned a few new words such as "the" and "in" contained in sentences, but attempts to coax her to read usually brought about refusal or deliberate wrong answers. She wanted chiefly to glue pictures and stories into her new book. She also asked about the names of letters contained in the sentences. Beyond this, she was not interested in the reading activity and her attention wandered.

The total learning period covered approximately twenty days with an average of ten or fifteen minutes daily. Cindy learned to read forty words, learned to look at words from left to right, and became interested in the names of letters during this time.

Velia

William H. Fowler, a psychologist, gives a detailed account of how he taught his daughter, Velia, to read at the age of two years.[74] Velia had been given a planned program of intensive cognitive stimulation from her earliest weeks. It was believed that this early experience was a major factor in developing her IQ to its high range of 150 - 170 between

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[74]Fowler, William H. (1962). Teaching a two-year-old to read: An experiment in early childhood. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 66. pp. 181 - 283. Cited by Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 59 - 60.

the ages of two and eight.[75] Velia learned to identify with ease all capitals by twenty-one months and most small letters by twenty-three months.[76]

Fowler began his nine-month experiment of teaching her to read when she was age two. He used a combination of methods in a trial-and-error, but carefully regulated approach. Techniques explored included dramatic play, reinforcement procedures, phonics, whole word learning, and variations in type style and size. Picture association and various other materials and methods of presenting stimuli were also experimented with.[77]

By the end of the experiment, Velia had acquired a recognition vocabulary of about 250 words and could read a few isolated primer-type sentences. She was beginning to read preprimers, and could perceive words with increasing precision using phonic cues.[78]

Velia experienced emotional problems near the end of the program when she began to attend nursery school.[79] This

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[75] Fowler, W. (in press). Teaching a two-year-old to read: An experiment in early childhood learning. Genetic Psychology Monographs. Cited by Fowler, William (1962). Cognitive learning in infancy and early childhood. Psychological Bulletin, 59 (2). pp. 116 - 152.

[76] Ibid., p. 132. [77] Ibid. [78] Ibid.

[79] Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 59 - 60.

showed up in her reading. She suddenly seemed to lose interest and to resent being asked questions. The instruction was continued but was decreased in amount, rate, and complexity. However, this failed to improve Velia's attitude.

For nineteen months after the conclusion of Fowler's experiment, Velia made little progress in reading. She forgot many sight words but seemed to remember letters. When she was five, her interest began to grow again, until she was reading in third grade texts.[80] Follow-up tests and observation to age eight years and five months revealed her to be reading avidly two to three grades above level.[81]

Larry Wilson

Stanley Krippner, a director of a child study center, gives an account of a boy whom he calls Larry Wilson, who began to read at eighteen months.[82] According to Larry's parents, the child had said his first words when he was ten months old. From that time, his language development had been very rapid.

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[80] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 60.

[81] Fowler (1962), op. cit., p. 132.

[82] Krippner, Stanley (1963, October). The boy who read at eighteen months. Exceptional Children, 30. pp. 105 - 109.

His reading ability was traced to a picture dictionary he had received for Christmas shortly after his first birthday. As he looked through it, he asked his parents to read the captions. Soon he was going through the book himself saying "A is for apple, B is for ball."

Larry also began to notice numbers, letters, and words in his environment and requested that they be identified. At eighteen months, he spelled out and read the word "Vicks" from a medicine bottle. From that time on, he spelled out words and pronounced them. By age three, he was reading a book of poems by Carl Sandburg. At age three and a half, he was discovered using correctly the index of a book.

Larry was referred to the Child Study Center when he was four years and two months old, by his parents, who wished to receive suggestions for guiding their son's development. Tests revealed him to have a mental age of six years and seven months and an IQ of 157.

Larry failed the reading readiness test even though he was already reading on the second and third grade level. The test indicated that he would be a "poor risk" for reading instruction because of his inability to copy designs and work quickly and accurately with a pencil. Larry did have a problem with visual motor skills. However, it is obvious that the test did not accurately measure his readiness to read.

The Wilsons were given advice regarding suitable books, games, and activities which would help Larry continue his pattern of development. They were cautioned not to force or pressure him into any specific area of growth because the natural unfolding of his talent had served him quite well thus far.

John

Jane W. Torrey gives an account of a child called John, who could both read and write when he entered kindergarten at the age of four years and ten months.[83] John's father had received approximately eight years of education and his mother about ten years. The father was a truckdriver and the mother was a maid in a hospital. John was the third of five children, ranging in age from eleven years to less than one year. According to Torrey, the family was lower middle-class or lower.

The mother reported that John had not begun talking especially early but had been able to read almost from the time he could talk. No one had read to him or taught him to read. Both she and John's grandmother, who lived with the family, had been surprised when they discovered him reading

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[83]Torrey, Jane W. (1969, May). Learning to read without a teacher: A case study. Elementary English, 46. pp. 550 - 556, 658.

can labels, written television notices, and his sister's third grade library book. He probably did not have the benefit of his older siblings' help, since at age five, he read better than either of them. He even read stories to his older brother that the brother could not read for himself.

According to Torrey, John's extraordinary reading ability did not seem to stem from unusually high intelligence or extraordinary verbal ability. His highest IQ score in grade one was 111; his verbal IQ score was 96. His reading and spelling achievement scores were high at 4.8 and 5.0 respectively, but his arithmetic achievement score was only 1.0.

The only possible source of instruction the mother could suggest was television commercials. When John was younger, he knew them all by heart and recited them as they appeared on the screen. The mother could never get his attention until the commercial was over.

Torrey says it seems possible that a child could get a start on reading from commercials for the following reasons. Her check on television showed that an average of about forty words per hour are simultaneously shown and pronounced. Commercials are frequently repeated; they are usually loud, lively, and simple in order to get attention. Memorization of short sentences is facilitated by catchy

tunes. Many common words are shown and the unfamiliar brand names are usually short or easy to pronounce.

Tommy Lunski

Glenn Doman, who worked with brain-injured children at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia, gives a short account of Tommy Lunski.[84] Tommy was severely brain-injured and could not move or talk at three years and two weeks old. His parents had been advised to place him in an institution, for there was no hope for him to improve; however, they refused. They took him to the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential for an evaluation, and Tommy was then started in a treatment program.

Sixty days after the program was started, Tommy could creep. On his third visit to the Institutes, he could say "Mommy" and "Daddy." When Tommy was three and a half years old and speaking two words, his mother bought him an alphabet book.

By age four, Tommy's speech development was progressing, and he could read the words in his alphabet book even more easily than he could read the letters. When he was four

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[84]Doman, Glenn (1964). How to teach your baby to read. New York: Random House. pp. 12 - 16.

years and two months old, he could read Dr. Seuss' book, "Green Eggs and Ham." By four years and six months, Tommy could and had read all of the Dr. Seuss books. His evaluation at this time was: progressing beautifully. By his fifth birthday, Tommy could read anything, including Reader's Digest. He was speed-reading and comprehending the material. By age six, Tommy was walking, though shakily. He was reading at the sixth grade level.

Doman says that Tommy is just one case of an early reader. He says there were over four hundred mothers and fathers of brain-injured children at various stages of teaching their children to read under the direction of the Institutes. In addition, he has received hundreds of letters from other parents who have taught their normal two and three year olds to read.

Doman does not say what method was used to teach Tommy to read; but he advocates a sight word approach and has developed the Doman method, which is discussed in the next section. He believes that the alphabet should not be taught until the child has a large reading vocabulary and has read the first book. He also believes that phonics instruction is unnecessary.

Gynneth

Felicity Hughes, a mother and teacher, tells how her daughter, Gynneth learned to read by the age of two years and seven months from the Doman method supplemented with phonics instruction.[85] Hughes began teaching Gynneth on her second birthday, which was April 21, 1967.

On April 25, Gynneth knew the difference between mummy and daddy. By May 17, she knew the "self" vocabulary. By June 4, Gynneth had learned the words from her first book and had read it. By July 6, she had learned the words from the second book and had read it. She was also learning the alphabet. On July 19, Gynneth began working on sounds in two-letter words having short i. By July 23, she had learned the vocabulary for her third book and had read it in small print. She also finished the alphabet.

By July 25, Gynneth knew the words from her fourth book and had read it. Between July 25 and September 6, Gynneth was learning new words and reading a new book every few days. On September 6, she had a reading vocabulary of 275 words. On September 7, she began using the sound chart (ba, be, bi, bo, bu, etc.) to translate new three-letter

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[85]Hughes, Felicity (1971). Reading and writing before school: The reading revolution at home and at school. London: Cape.

words. On September 20, Gynneth began to learn how the magic e works in words that she already knew, such as made, wise, and time.

By October 4, Gynneth was decoding regular words herself. Her mother was only teaching her irregular words. By October 13, she had a reading vocabulary of 450 words, and new words were not being presented at all. She was decoding them from the text, sometimes with help from her mother.

Between October 20 and December 6, Gynneth read through "The Cat in the Hat Beginning Book Dictionary," which had a total vocabulary of 1,350 words. Gynneth did not learn all of them, but her mother estimates that she knew at least 1,000 by the end of the book. At this time the mother ended her teaching and said she wouldn't ask Gynneth to read regularly anymore, but would let her read as she so desired.

Hughes used the Doman method, which is a sight-word approach, and supplemented it with phonics instruction. Besides word cards, she often used a chalkboard to teach words and sentences. She believes that phonics is a necessary part of a reading program.

Robin

Danny and Miho Steinberg, two psycholinguists from the University of Illinois, report on their son's learning to read in an unpublished article entitled "Reading in the Crib."[86] They began to teach Robin in his prespeech stages of infancy.

He first became familiar with the letters and learned to identify them by pointing. He then began to recognize printed words on cards and eventually progressed to reading books on his own.

At age four and a half, Robin was a happy boy who delighted in reading. He had about 100 books of his own, which he could read fluently, with feeling, and with complete comprehension. He had also joined the public library and was reading an average of eight or nine library books per week. Reading test norms placed him beyond the third grade level.

Soderbergh Case

Ragnhild Soderbergh, Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Stockholm, gives a very detailed account

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[86] Steinberg, Danny and Steinberg, Miho (1970). Reading in the crib, Unpublished manuscript. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois. Cited by Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 56 - 58.

of how her daughter learned to read Swedish between the ages of two years and four months and three years and six months, from the Doman method.[87] Although the language was Swedish, this case is mentioned because it is a very detailed linguistic study of how the child acquired the code.

Soderbergh shows how her daughter, as she learned more and more words, gradually broke them down into smaller units: first morphemes, then graphemes. At last she arrived at an understanding of the correspondences between sound (phoneme) and letter (grapheme) and was able to read any new word through analysis and synthesis. Soderbergh points out that the child discovered the code without direct teaching of it, just as children learn the rules of spoken language without being directly taught the rules.

She used the Doman method for teaching reading, because she felt that it was almost completely devoid of formal instruction. She did make a few modifications, however.

In presenting a new word, Doman says to show it for a few seconds, telling the child what it is.[88] However,

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[87] Soderbergh, Ragnhild (1977). Reading in early childhood, A linguistic study of a preschool child's gradual acquisition of reading ability. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

[88] Doman, op. cit., p. 111.

Soderbergh always allowed her daughter to take the new word card in her hands and have a real look at it.

Another interesting modification was the way Soderbergh presented "functors," words which link the parts of a sentence together or express simple semantic relations, such as "what" or "in." Doman refers to them as "sentence-structure" vocabulary and advises that each one be taught separately, and a new word not be taught until the previous one has been mastered. He also says not to explain or define these words; just be sure the child can read them.[89] Soderbergh's daughter objected to functors. She experienced difficulty because she disliked them and did not want to pay any attention to them. Thus, Soderbergh decided to present each functor first on a separate word card and immediately afterwards put it on the floor together with well-known words forming a sentence. When this approach was used, the functors did not cause any more trouble.

It was pointed out that the little girl learned the code without any direct teaching of it. Soderbergh believes that young learners, age two to four years, may have the ability to discover the code easily by themselves; but older learners, age six or seven, might profit more from

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[89]Doman, op. cit., pp. 131 - 132.

being taught the code parallel with instruction that exposes them to words in context.

Mino-Garces' Case Studies

Fernando Mino-Garces, who studied child language acquisition and reading acquisition, gives six case studies of early readers.[90] Jay's case will not be discussed here, as he was taught reading solely at a Montessori school. The other home cases are discussed, as they bring in some interesting situations.

Fernando began the reading process at age three years and ten months; Javier began at two years and one month. Both of these boys, being bilingual, learned to read English and Spanish during their early years. Their father, who is also the author of these case studies, taught them at home, using the Lado method, which is a reading for meaning and sight word approach. The Montessori school, which they attended, also taught them reading by using the phonics approach. Thus, they were taught from two totally different methods at the same time.

Early educators who objected to parent involvement in reading believed that parents, by using different methods

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[90]Mino-Garces, Fernando (1981). Early reading acquisition: Six psycholinguistic case studies. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

than those employed in the schools, would only confuse and frustrate their children. However, in speaking about Fernando's case, the author says that Fernando's learning at home reinforced and improved his learning at school and vice versa.[91] He did not become confused and frustrated in school. According to Mino-Garces, one approach strengthened the other. He believes that the combined approach, reading for meaning and phonics, is a good one to follow.

Another child, Jonathan, also learned to read from the Lado and phonics methods. His mother, who was a teacher, taught him to recognize and sound out the English letters by the age of three years. He entered a Montessori school, where the phonics approach was continued.

When he was five, a problem developed with his reading. His mother became seriously ill and had to go to Boston for an operation. This situation caused much family tension and Jonathan began refusing to read. He continued his refusal, which greatly frustrated his mother. Blaming Jonathan's attitude on the school, she demanded that it do something to rectify the situation. According to the author, the problem continued to escalate, reaching large and damaging proportions. The mother claimed that she never

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[91]Mino-Garces, op. cit., p. 31.

exerted any pressure on her son; but it was obvious that Jonathan felt her anxiety.

Mino-Garces decided to introduce the boy to the Lado method in an effort to help him regain his enthusiasm for reading. Gradually, Jonathan's attitude changed as he realized that the whole purpose of reading was to have fun. No pressure was put on him as to how much or how well he read. The idea was to have a good time. He began to read again without rebelling.

A last minute report, given by the mother, stated that their eye doctor found Jonathan's focus and tracking mechanism to be immature. His eyes were not focusing together -- they were not synchronizing. Mino-Garces states that this could have been the problem, that Jonathan's eyes were not mature enough to follow the small print in books. Since the Lado method uses very large print, it helped Jonathan to overcome his problem.

Tara, Jonathan's sister, began the reading process when she was two years and six months old. She was taught from the Lado method and had almost finished Book Two when Mino-Garces ended his observation. He states that Tara's learning to read with the Lado method also helped to renew Jonathan's interest in reading.

Tina, whose family spoke predominately Spanish, learned to read at home, beginning at age four years and six months. Her mother used the Lado method with guidance from the author.

At first, since Tina knew the alphabet in Spanish, she tried to recognize the letters, more than to read words. She wanted to turn word cards upside down to see what they were and to call letters by their Spanish names. She also wanted to play with the pages of her book. The mother thought that because of Tina's age and temperament, it would be impossible to teach her to read. However, Tina learned to read all of the books in the Lado series and began reading short storybooks.

During the reading process, the mother sometimes showed disappointment when Tina did not meet her expectations. She became nervous when Tina's coloring was messy; she expressed disappointment with her messy pasting; she erased Tina's words and letters until she wrote them correctly. These kinds of reactions are not recommended by early reading advocates, because they may deter a child from learning. Tina did, in fact, lose interest in writing, even on her blackboard.

When the child entered kindergarten, her mother informed the teacher that she already knew how to read. The teacher responded that kindergarten was not to teach reading yet.

Even though Tina had attended nursery school and kindergarten, her entrance into first grade was very traumatic. The first two weeks were devoted to testing. For some unknown reason, Tina became very upset and cried so much that the teachers had to call her parents to calm her down. For a long time, Tina refused to talk to her teachers or participate in class. The mother said that perhaps Tina felt she was put into competition with the other children and feared losing. She said that Tina did not like to compete, not even in games at a birthday party. Another reason might have been that a test required Tina to write down words as they sounded to her. She asked to be told a word's spelling or to be allowed use of a dictionary, but her requests were denied. This may have frustrated her.

Little by little, Tina overcame the problem. By January, she was happy in school and participated normally in all activities.

Jed

Bonnie Lass, researcher and mother, tells how her son, Jed, beginning at two weeks old, developed an interest for printed material and became a reader before the age of three

years. Her first report covers the time between Jed's birth and age two.[92] A second report covers age two to three.[93]

Jed was observed staring at printed material at two weeks old. He began using books as playthings at three months old and became interested in looking at and listening to them at six months. By twelve months, he had favorite books and requested rereadings. He discovered television at thirteen months and enjoyed Sesame Street and books with Sesame Street characters.

Jed's mother said she had no idea when he could first recognize letters; but at seventeen months, he recognized eight different ones and enjoyed locating them on signs, television, and books. He identified all letters, however, as "B" or "D." By eighteen months, he recognized twenty letters and could identify fourteen of them. By nineteen months, he identified numbers one to ten and identified his first whole word, "apple."

At twenty-four months, Jed pretended to read the titles of favorite books and identified products from logos. He

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[92]Lass, Bonnie (1982, October). Portrait of my son as an early reader. The Reading Teacher, 36 (1). pp. 20 - 28.

[93]Lass, Bonnie (1983, February). Portrait of my son as an early reader II. The Reading Teacher, 36 (6). pp. 508 - 515.

could identify all uppercase and most lowercase letters. In addition, he had mastered double digits to twenty.

When Jed was two years and four months old, he could identify thirty-one words. He showed a preference for learning new ones in meaning clumps, such as color, number, and shape words. By age two years and nine months, he had begun to decode new words for himself and was reading books independently.

Lass reports that Jed showed no early evidence of outstanding ability. All developmental milestones, such as sitting, crawling, walking, and talking were accomplished at average ages.

Teaching took place at home, but it was incidental. Jed raised questions about the names of letters, numbers, and words, and the answers were provided. In addition, books, crayons, paper, plastic letters, and the like were available. Jed also learned from Sesame Street and from the family day care where phonics instruction was given.

Casa dei Bambini (House of Children)

Although the Casa dei Bambini is not a case of home learning, it is mentioned here because many of Maria Montessori's techniques have been adapted for teaching reading at home. Maria Montessori was the first woman to

become a medical doctor in Italy.[94] Her work as a physician led her into contact with mentally retarded children, and she became interested in their education. After studying and working with them, she succeeded in teaching a number of these children to read and write well enough to pass public examinations meant for normal children.[95] This success caused her to question the methods used in educating normal children.

In 1906 Montessori began the Casa dei Bambini, in which she gathered children of ages three to six from a slum in Rome.[96] She set up a prepared environment for them with furniture scaled down to their size, didactic (teaching) materials which she herself designed, and an atmosphere of freedom in which the children could discover and learn with little guidance from the directress. After a time, these children "exploded" into writing and reading.[97]

The Casa dei Bambini and Montessori's work have become famous. Montessori schools have been set up and many small

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[94] Standing, E. M. (1957). Maria Montessori, Her life and work. Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild. p. 5.

[95] Ibid., p. 11.

[96] Orem, R. C. (1971). Montessori today. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons. p. 10.

[97] Heater, Sandra H. (1980). Teaching preschool reading. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press. p. 4.

children have learned to read between the ages of four and five. The method is a phonics approach which teaches the sounds first. Some Montessori didactic materials used directly for reading are sandpaper letters, sound boxes, mystery bag, sound cards, and moveable alphabet. Sandra H. Heater explains how the Montessori materials can be made and used at home.[98]

Terman's Study of Gifted Children

Lewis Terman's study of 552 gifted children, which was mentioned on pages 25 - 26 of this paper, tells how some of the children learned to read early. He asked the parents to respond on a questionnaire whether their children learned to read before starting school and how.[99]

In a large majority of cases, only incidental or casual assistance was reported. In five cases, the child had a private tutor, in no case for more than a half-hour daily. In seventeen cases, the child was said to have "taught himself" without the knowledge of any member of the family, until it was suddenly discovered that the child could read. "By playing with books, pictures, or newspapers" was a

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[98] Heater, op. cit.

[99] Terman, Lewis M. (1925). Mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children. Genetic studies of genius, 1. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. pp. 271 - 272.

frequent answer. Very informal assistance from some member of the household, usually the mother, was reported for 129 cases. In many cases it was specified that this help was given only in response to urgent solicitations on the part of the child.

Durkin's Longitudinal Studies

Dolores Durkin's longitudinal studies are considered some of the best research in early reading. She was prompted to do them by a chance encounter with an early reader named Midge.[100] Durkin discovered the child reading the title pages and captions of a reading readiness workbook during the sixth week of the readiness program in grade one. After subsequent testing, which was requested by the classroom teacher, Midge was found to have an IQ of 148 and a reading achievement grade level of 4.2.

Her parents revealed that she had learned to read from her frequent queries about words. She had concealed her reading ability both in kindergarten and in first grade because of a desire to be like the other children and to do what they were doing. Durkin's discovery of Midge provoked

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[100]Durkin, Dolores (1966). Children who read early: Two longitudinal studies. New York: Teachers College Press. pp. 1 - 2.

curiosity about other early readers who might be in other first grades.

The first study took place in Oakland, California between 1958 and 1964. Forty-nine beginning first graders from 27 schools (slightly less than 1% of the population tested) were found to be early readers.[101] Their reading scores ranged from 1.5 to 4.5 on a grade-level norm scale. Their IQ scores ranged from 91 to 161. Only seven of the children came from families classified as professional or upper-middle class; 15 were lower-middle class; 26 were upper-lower class, and one was lower-lower class.

Durkin found that none of the subjects had learned to read early "all by himself." Most received help from their mothers; some received help from their father, sibling, other relative, or friend. All 49 children had been read to by one or both parents. Many of the parents themselves read more than the average adult.[102]

Eleven parents said that they had set out deliberately to teach their preschoolers to read. The reasons given for their decisions were: the child was so persistently interested in learning to read; the child was ready for reading;

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[101]Durkin (1966), op. cit., p. 15.

[102]Ibid., p. 53.

the parent wanted to avoid possible problems in school; the parent felt a responsibility to get the child ready to do well in first grade; the child had an overt curiosity and asked about words and numbers. The other 38 subjects did not receive deliberate instruction but were given help because of their overt curiosity and their questions about words and numbers.[103]

The kinds of reading help given to the subjects were:

Talking about sounds of letters.

Identifying words for subjects.

Playing school.

Using alphabet books, picture dictionaries, easy basal readers, workbooks, encyclopedia.

Helping subject with printing.

Helping an older sibling with reading while the subject watched.

Helping subject with spelling.

Helping subject with word meaning.[104]

According to Durkin, the sources from which the children's preschool interest in reading developed were:

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[103] Durkin (1966), op. cit., p. 55.

[104] Ibid., p. 54.

Being read to at home.
Eagerness to keep up with older sibling.
Availability of reading materials in the home.
Availability of blackboard.
Interest in learning to print.
Curiosity about TV advertisements.
Interest in how to spell words.
Curiosity about outdoor signs.
Desire to read correspondence from out of town relatives.
Interest in the encyclopedia.[105]

Early reading did not seem to harm any of the subjects.[106] They did not experience reading problems at school. In fact, fifteen of them were double-promoted. These tended to be the best readers in the group. The early readers maintained their lead over non-early readers over the six-year period of the study. The fifteen early readers who had IQs of 120 or less achieved at a higher level than would have been predicted on the basis of their intelligence.

The second study took place in New York City between 1961 and 1964. It consisted of 156 early readers from 33 schools (approximately 4% of the population tested).[107] The attempt was made to choose New York City schools, which together would represent fairly equally all of the socio-economic levels, except the upper-upper class which would not be included in a public school population.

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[105]Durkin (1966), op. cit., p. 55.

[106]Ibid., p. 34 - 40.

[107]Ibid., p. 73 - 77.

The children's reading scores ranged from 1.4 to 5.2 according to grade-level norms. Their IQ scores ranged from 82 to 170.

Durkin's major interest in this study was to compare early and non-early readers. Thirty of the early readers were randomly selected for a special experimental group, and thirty non-early readers comprised the control group. Some interesting findings from the study follow:

1. More mothers of early readers said they read more often than the average adult (83 - 33). This means that 83% of the mothers of the early readers and 33% of the mothers of the non-early readers described themselves as reading more often than the average adult.

2. Fewer mothers of early readers believed that reading ought to be taught by a trained person (30 - 70). This means that 30% of the mothers of early readers and 70% of the mothers of non-early readers believed that reading ought to be taught by a trained person.

The above demonstrates how all of the statements are to be interpreted.

3. More mothers of early readers were college graduates (33 - 10).

4. More early readers were read to at home, prior to entering school (100 - 73).

5. More mothers of early readers said parents should give help with skills like reading to preschool children (100 - 50).

6. In a week's time, fewer early readers watched television for six hours or more (70 - 93).

7. As a result of watching television, more early readers developed a curiosity about written words (53 - 10).

8. More early readers showed preschool interest in learning to read (100 - 73).

9. More parents of early readers attributed preschool interest in reading partly to:

.....availability of paper and pencils in the home (83 - 18).

.....availability of reading materials in the home (73 - 14).

.....availability of a blackboard in the home (57 - 23).

.....interest in the meaning of words (47 - 9).

10. More parents of early readers gave preschool help with:

.....printing (93 - 73).

.....identification of written words (91 - 27).

.....the meaning of words (77 - 27).

.....spelling (73 - 27).

.....the sounds of letters (67 - 27).[108]

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[108]Durkin (1966), op. cit., pp. 95 - 102.

In summarizing the findings, both studies involved children who learned to read early at home prior to first grade. The early readers did not experience problems at school. Even after six years, they maintained their lead in achievement over non-early readers of the same mental age.

Both groups showed great variation in IQ scores (91 to 161 in California, 82 to 170 in New York). The value of an early start in reading might be especially great for children of lower IQ, because they are provided additional time to practice and achieve (This is also discussed on pages 22 - 23 of this paper).

The research findings showed no simple connection between early reading and the socio-economic status of a family. (In the first study, a preponderance of the early readers came from "blue collar" families.) What is much more important, the research data indicated, is the presence of parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and their requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation, information, and contentment.[109]

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[109]Durkin (1966), op. cit., pp. 133 - 136.

King and Friesen Study

Ethel M. King and Doris T. Friesen discuss their comparison study of 31 early readers and 31 non-early readers attending kindergarten in Calgary, Canada.[110] The early readers made up slightly less than one percent of the kindergarten pupils. Almost all of them had received some informal help at home, but had not received reading instruction in the kindergarten program. The two groups were tested in kindergarten and again after a year of instruction.

As a group, the early readers were more intelligent, with IQs ranging from 91 to 132.[111] The IQs of the non-early readers ranged from 62 to 120. The 31 early readers, tested on an oral word reading test, ranged in achievement from low grade one to high grade five.

The factors in the family background which appeared to be most important were the mother's educational attainment and the father's occupation.[112] Mothers of early readers achieved a significantly higher level of education than the mothers of non-early readers. The socio-economic index was

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[110] King, Ethel M. and Friesen, Doris T. (1972, September). Children who read in kindergarten. The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 18 (3). pp. 147 - 161.

[111] Ibid., p. 153.

[112] Ibid., p. 157.

higher and the average family size was smaller for early readers than for non-early readers.

Almost all of the children in both groups had access to easy reading material in the home. Some of them had extensive book collections. The majority of children in each group were read to regularly; however, more of the early readers visited public libraries.[113]

Twenty-six of the early readers had received some help in learning to read at home, four had received very little help, and one had no help.[114] The help consisted of teaching letter sounds, teaching letter names, telling the child words on request, printing words, using commercial materials, answering questions, vocabulary training while reading to the child, observing the child playing school with older children, and encouraging the child to print words. After one year of instruction, the two groups still differed significantly in oral word reading, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Clark's Study of Fluent Readers

Margaret M. Clark tells about a group of early readers whom she studied in Scotland between 1969 and 1972. This

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[113] King & Friesen, op. cit., p. 152.

[114] Ibid., p. 153.

study involved 32 children who were already reading fluently, or had a reading age of at least seven years and six months, when they entered school at approximately five years of age.[115] Clark says that in a surprising number of ways the fluent readers were similar to the subjects in Durkin's studies, even though this study took place in Scotland at a later time with younger children and a different criterion with regard to reading level.

The reading ages of the fluent readers ranged from six years and eight months to twelve years. Their IQs, according to the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test, ranged from 100 to 170.[116]

The children came from a variety of home backgrounds; some were from large families, others were only children. Some parents had higher education and were in professions, others had left school early and had no further training. All parents did, however, seem to value education and to wish for their children what they had themselves experienced -- or what they had missed.[117]

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[115]Clark, Margaret M. (1976). Young fluent readers (What can they teach us). London: Heinemann Educational Books. pp. 10 - 11.

[116]Ibid., pp. 12, 23.

[117]Ibid., pp. 101 - 102.

The mothers and those fathers who were interviewed clearly found their families both stimulating and absorbing. Most mothers did not work outside the home, even part-time. For those that did, it was in such a way that they could be home for lunch or to greet their children on their return from school. Mothers welcomed rather than rebuffed attempts at verbal interaction by their children, and they provided them with a variety of interesting materials with which to occupy themselves.[118]

Few parents had consciously attempted to teach their children to read. When the children showed an interest, an adult, usually the mother, would devote her time by reading to them, talking with them, or answering their questions. These adults seemed willing to provide instant encouragement and assistance and would also take part in play with their children even at the expense of delaying their other activities.[119]

Reading was considered an important part of family life.[120] Where the supply of books in the home was limited, there was extensive use of library facilities. Most of the mothers read widely; some fathers did as well. Some families made reading a shared social experience.

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[118]Clark, op. cit., pp. 102, 42 - 43.

[119]Ibid., p. 43. [120]Ibid., p. 44.

Reports from the school indicated that the fluent readers continued to show impressive attainment in reading, spelling, and written work. They appeared to be well adjusted to school and generally acceptable to their classmates.[121]

Billy and Theresa

The author of this paper would like to include one more account of early reading. This one involves a personal experience with two young children who are still in the process of learning to read early.

Before I got the idea to investigate early reading, I attempted to teach my son, Billy some letters and words, beginning when he was two years and three months old. It all started when he found four magnetic capital letters, "B," "I," "L," and "Y" in his Christmas stocking. He became very excited when he saw that they could stick onto the refrigerator, metal cupboard, closet door, and outside door. He was allowed to play with them as long as I or his father was able to watch that he didn't put them into his mouth. He first learned to distinguish between "B" and "I," then he learned "L" and last "Y."

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[121]Clark, op. cit., p. 102.

I did not have a planned program to teach him; nor did I work with him for any set period of time, not even daily. We merely played games with the letters when he and I were in the mood. Billy's father also joined in sometimes when he was home from work. We always showed great excitement when Billy retrieved a given letter or identified one.

We worked on the four magnetic letters for about three weeks. Billy learned to distinguish between the first two very rapidly; but it took longer with each of the other two.

After he knew them thoroughly, I showed them to him printed on cards, two and one-half inches by three inches. These cards were easily made by cutting unlined three by five inch index cards in half. One letter was printed on a card. Letters measured about two inches high and were printed with a green permanent ink magic marker. Green was used only because it was on hand. Later, materials were also printed with blue and with black markers.

We played games with the letter cards and with the magnetic letters. Sometimes Billy would bring me the ones I asked for; sometimes he would identify the ones I showed him; sometimes he would bring me the correct magnetic letter when I showed him a certain letter card. At other times he would initiate the identification game and would show me a letter and ask me to name it. I would always answer correctly, but in a question form, such as "Is it 'B'?"

He would then mimic some of my reactions such as smiling, cheering, hugging me, dancing around with me, or just telling me I was right.

I then taught Billy to recognize his name. Although he knew the capital letters for his name, I did not use them in printing it, except, of course, for "B." I printed "Billy" in large letters on two different three by five inch unlined index cards with green magic marker. When I showed him the first card, he became very excited to learn that it said his name. He tried to kiss and hug it. I was glad that the marking ink was permanent and thus run-proof. I pointed out to Billy that both word cards were alike but did not call attention to the lower case letters.

A few days later, I gave Billy the magnetic letter "M." After reviewing everything covered through games, I presented the word "Mommy." As with "Billy," I made two cards for "Mommy," and we played games with the four cards. Billy seemed proud to be able to read so many.

The next letter presented was "D." The same procedure was used in teaching it. After reviewing everything through games, Billy received the word cards for "Daddy." He was very excited about showing his father this new word that evening. He read all six of his word cards to him and received great cheering, hugs, and applause.

"T" was the next letter taught and then the word "Theresa" for Billy's little sister, who was one year old. Billy showed Theresa her name and seemed to try to teach it to her. I had to caution him not to give it to her because she might try to eat it. I noticed Billy at different times showing Theresa her name and telling her it said Theresa. She seemed to learn it from his efforts. I did not try to teach her any letters or words as I thought she was too young to learn them. She also did not witness my teaching Billy, since I generally worked with him during her naptimes.

At this point, Billy could recognize the four names of our family members and the letters B, I, L, Y, M, D, and T. Being undecided about what words should be presented next, I concentrated on teaching the remaining capital letters of the alphabet.

I taught only one at a time, making sure to review, through games, after each letter was learned. We used magnetic letters, letter cards, word cards, wooden alphabet blocks, and a picture alphabet which was on the wall in the children's bedroom.

I began to teach both children the alphabet song, making sure to be especially distinct with the letters L through P. They had unlimited paper and crayons available

for coloring and scribbling. They both also loved to watch Sesame Street on television.

Though I had tried to read short books to Billy before he was a year old, he would never sit still long enough to even look at the pictures. He was always very active, wanting to jump or play on my lap or to grab the book, pull at its pages, or put it into his mouth. At about two years of age, he began to sit still long enough to look at a few pages. Theresa, on the other hand, loved to sit on my lap to look at and listen to books from a very early age.

After Billy had learned all of the capitals, I decided to teach him the beginning words from the Ginn 720 series: Bill, Lad, Jill, runs, hides. I had an old take-home practice reader which I thought could be Billy's first reader. I taught the words to Billy, one at a time, again reviewing after each one. Billy had no trouble distinguishing "Bill" from "Billy" once I pointed out the "y" in "Billy." The fact that Billy's father's name is Bill probably helped him too. He often put the words "Daddy" and "Bill" together. He learned "Jill" easily. He also learned "runs" and "hides" quickly because he loved to act them out.

When Billy was three years old, he could identify all capital letters and could read the words: Billy, Mommy, Daddy, Theresa, Bill, Lad, Jill, runs, hides. Theresa,

then twenty months old, could identify the letters "T" and "B," and the words: Theresa, Billy, Mommy, Daddy. She had begun learning them from Billy and I had also reinforced her learning.

At this time, I tried to have Billy read from the Ginn take-home practice reader, since he knew the words. However, he seemed very confused and perhaps troubled. I became worried about this situation and thought I had made a terrible mistake by teaching him. I discontinued the teaching altogether, since I didn't want to cause my children any harm.

Billy continued to play with the word cards and sometimes put them together to make simple sentences. He also played with the magnetic letters and especially enjoyed putting them onto their magnetic puzzle base. I helped him only when he asked for help. Both children enjoyed books and enjoyed Sesame Street.

A few months later, when I was very busy, Billy asked me for his favorite fruit, an apple. I asked him to wait for a few minutes, but he kept insisting relentlessly that he wanted an apple. I became tired of hearing it and said, "Oh, you want an "a-p-p-l-e" and began singing the letters in a made-up song. The song appealed to both Billy and Theresa, and they began to sing along. This kept their minds busy until I was able to get them an apple. Later, I

showed them the word "apple," and they learned to read it as well as spell it.

"Banana," which was Theresa's favorite fruit was learned by both children in practically the same way. They learned to spell "Billy" and "Theresa" by our chanting the letters similarly to a football cheer. They both learned "milk" from asking about the word on the milk jug. They learned "no" from my denying some of their requests by saying "n-o, no!" When Billy started to insist "n-o, yes!" I corrected him with "y-e-s, yes," and he learned this word. I put the words on cards so the children could see as well as hear them. In this way, Billy began to learn some of the lower case letters.

After realizing that my children really wanted to learn, I wondered how I could help them further. This led me to the idea of researching early reading, and my research has encouraged me to continue teaching my children.

One day, as I was helping Billy with the magnetic letter puzzle, I discovered that he had forgotten the names of about half of the capital letters. I began to reteach them, and he seemed to learn much more quickly the second time. I put up a horizontal alphabet chart within his reach, and he started to point to the letters as he sang the alphabet song. He also referred to the chart to help him identify letters he had forgotten.

Billy soon began to notice words on television, on buildings, and in advertisements. He learned the words: Hills, K-Mart, Gold Circle, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and Burger King in this way. He would sometimes point out these words in newspapers and ask me questions such as "Does this say Hills?" And he would be correct. Billy and Theresa both learned the words: cat, Sue, Jimmy, and Pepper from storybooks.

At age four, Billy could identify all capital letters and sixteen lowercase letters, could sing the alphabet song distinctly and could point to the letters as he sang it, could do the magnetic letter puzzle by himself, often asked about the sounds of letters and could name some words that start with B, M, and D, showed great interest in books and often asked to be read to, could print his name, could print the letters B, I, L, P, T, Y, i, l, and y, and could identify the following words: Billy, Mommy, Daddy, Theresa, Bill, Lad, Jill, runs, hides, apple, banana, milk, no, yes, cat, Hills, K-Mart, Gold Circle, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Sue, Jimmy, and Pepper.

Theresa, at age two years and eight months, showed great interest in books (sometimes asking for as many as three in a row or the same book over again three or four times), could sing the alphabet song distinctly, could do the magnetic letter puzzle with help, could identify the

letters B, T, M, and D, and the words: Theresa, Billy, Mommy, Daddy, apple, banana, milk, no, cat, Sue, Jimmy, and Pepper.

Both children seemed average in development. Billy began to walk alone at eighteen months. He was saying a few words at one year of age. Theresa began to walk alone at fifteen months. She, too, was saying a few words at one year of age, but developed more rapidly in word and sentence usage.

From my research, I have decided that the next step with Billy should be to make a home-made primer with large words. He evidently was not ready for small print when I tried to have him read the Ginn take-home practice reader. We will also continue to work on lowercase letters, sounds, and additional words.

Although Theresa doesn't know as many letters and words as Billy, I plan to put together a home-made primer for her as well. She has always enjoyed books and likes to do the same things as her brother. By teaching her one more word, "loves," and by using photographs of our family members, I can make her an easy reader with sentences such as "Theresa loves Mommy." or "Daddy loves Theresa." We will also continue to work on letters and words.

Teaching Methods

The case studies show that children have learned to read early from many different methods. Just as no single approach has been proven to be best at school, no single one has been found to be best for early reading at home. Wood Smethurst classifies the methods into three main groups or "paths":

1. Informal path.
2. Direct teaching/code emphasis path.
3. Direct teaching/meaning emphasis path.[122]

1. The informal path.

In this path children learn to read without someone intentionally teaching them. They seem to learn by using many different elements of the environment. Usually there is some direct teaching such as explaining about letters or sounds, writing, spelling, identifying words, or playing school. But children following this path mainly instigate their own instruction and figure out much reading for themselves. They almost invariably want to learn about reading, writing, books, and words. They will probably exhibit several of the following characteristics but few,

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[122]Smethurst, Wood (1975). Teaching young children to read at home. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 86.

if any, will exhibit all of them. These are the characteristics of a child who follows the informal path to reading:

1. Shows pronounced interest in writing -- goes from scribbling and drawing to copying letters and words to trying to write names and messages.

2. Is read aloud to frequently by adults or other children.

3. Lives in an environment where people read often and where books and magazines abound.

4. Plays games with adults and other children involving letters, sounds, and rhymes.

5. Asks to be told "what that word says" or "where it says Peter Rabbit" and so on, either while being read to or at other times.

6. Learns to write and recognize his or her own name and perhaps the names of others -- family, playmates, pets, friends.

7. Learns to recognize specific words, usually words with some personal meaning: his or her own name, trademarks, interest words like bomb and monkey, product names like coca-cola, Barbie, chevrolet.

8. Shows deep interest in one thing for long periods of time, e.g. cars, wildflowers, snakes, trains, cooking, birds, or fish.

9. Watches television -- sometimes quite intensively -- especially but not necessarily "Sesame Street," "The Electric Company," or other children's programs with reading content.

10. "Plays school" with other children.[123]

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[123]Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 86 - 87.

2. Direct teaching/code emphasis path.

In this path the parents, or other instructors, set out deliberately to teach their children to read by using a code emphasis approach. They directly teach their children how to master the elements and the use of the "code" -- the letters and spelling patterns of the written language.[124]

Although there are marked differences from program to program, the "code emphasis" approaches concentrate on teaching the elements of the code first: either the letter-names, sounds, or both. Once the code is learned, the next step is using it to learn how to read.

Most of the "code emphasis" approaches teach the names of the letters as well as some of the letter-sounds. These are often referred to as phonics approaches. The Montessori Method, which teaches the sounds first, is a phonics approach. Sandra H. Heater describes in a very helpful book how to use the Montessori Method to teach early reading at home.[125] Rudolf Flesch, who strongly recommends a phonics method, offers one in his book, "Why Johnny Can't

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[124]Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 90 - 91.

[125]Heater, Sandra Harvey (1980). Teaching preschool reading. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.

Read, And What You Can Do About It."[126] Another phonics oriented book, "The Bausell Home Learning Guide,"[127] gives detailed lesson plans for teaching early reading at home.

Another "code emphasis" method is the Linguistic Approach, which was devised by Leonard Bloomfield, who disapproved of the phonics techniques of "sounding out" and "blending" letter-sounds. Instead of teaching the sounds of letters, this method teaches the names of letters and then the spelling patterns of words.

Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence L. Barnhart describe their method in detail in the book, "Let's Read, A Linguistic Approach."[128] It begins by teaching the names of the letters, both upper and lower case. Once the letter-names are mastered, the next step is to introduce phonemically regular words, or words which follow a completely regular spelling pattern, such as can, man, Dan, ran, pan, fan, tan, Nan, and an. Only two words are introduced at a time until the child gets the idea. Gradually, the instruction

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126 Flesch, Rudolf (1955). Why Johnny can't read, And what you can do about it. New York: Harper and Row. pp. 135 - 222.

127 Bausell, R. Barker, Bausell, Carole R., and Bausell, Nellie B. (1980). The Bausell home learning guide: Teach your child to read. Philadelphia: Saunders Press.

128 Bloomfield, Leonard and Barnhart, Clarence L. (1961). Let's read, A linguistic approach. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

progresses through regular short-vowel words having a, i, u, e, and o, and then through the commonest irregular words. Children learn to read sentences made up of these words and proceed to stories.

A modified linguistics approach, called the Structural Reading Method, is also included in the "code emphasis" category. It uses both phonics and regular spelling patterns to teach reading, and begins by teaching sounds, not letter names.

Toni Gould's "Home Guide to Early Reading"[129] describes this method in great detail. She suggests many ideas and games for helping children learn to read early. The method begins by teaching the child to become aware of the beginning sounds of words. The sounds are taught by using pictures with their beginning letters superimposed on them in dark lines. For example, "m" is printed on a picture of a mitten; "a" is printed on a picture of an apple. The child learns the sound first and then the letter. Lower case letters are learned before capitals. Gould suggests that parents use the sequence and pictures given in Table One for teaching sound-letter correspondence.

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[129] Gould, Toni S. (1976). Home guide to early reading. New York: Walker and Co.

Table 1.

Gould's Sequence of Letters and Suggested Pictures for Teaching Sound-Letter Correspondence.[130]

"m"
magnet, mirror, marble, milk bottle, mop, mailbox, monkey, mouse, mitten, magazine, matches, mask

"f"
feather, fern, fork, football, fan, fish, fishing rod

"l"
lemon, lion, lamb, ladder, lipstick, loaf, lid, letter, lock, lime, leaf, lollipop, lamp, leopard, lettuce

"a"
ax, anchor, ant, apple, ambulance, astronaut

"t"
telephone, towel, toothbrush, tie, tent, tomato, turtle, teapot, top, tiger, toothpaste, table, turkey

"s"
sandwich, saw, sailboat, soap, salt, seal, sock

initial "k" spelled "c"
cup, cap, candle, curtain, cabbage, carrot, cake, camel, cat, cane, can, cape, cookie, candy, corn, comb

"n"
nest, net, needle, napkin, nut, nail, nurse, numerals, newspaper, necktie, note, nickel

"i"
igloo, inch, indian, ink, insect

"h"
hat, hose, hammer, hen, hanger, heart, house, horse, horn, handbag, hatchet, helicopter, hand, hoe

"p"
paper, perfume, pizza, penny, pin, pail, peacock, pie, puppet, pipe, pelican, paintbrush

"r"
raccoon, raisin, ribbon, radio, rope, rake, radish, robot, rocket, rose, rooster, ring

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[130]Gould, op. cit., pp. 109 - 113.

Table 1, Continued.

"b"
beads, bicycle, box, belt, bat, boot, ball, bell, balloon, book, buckle, bee, bib, basket, bull, bowl

"o"
olive, ostrich, otter, ox, orchid, octopus, orange

"g"
gum, garage, golf club, guitar, goose, gift

initial "k" spelled "k"
kangaroo, key, kerchief, king, kite, kettle, kitten

"e"
egg, elephant, elf, envelope, Eskimo

"d"
doctor, dish, daisy, duck, doughnut, dime, domino

"j"
jacket, jump rope, jacks, jam, jar

"u"
umpire, umbrella, Uncle Sam

"v"
vinegar, vase, violin, violet, vest, valentine

"z"
zebra, zoo, zinnia, zero, zipper

"w"
wagon, wigwam, windmill, watermelon, wallet, wishbone, web, witch

"y"
yo-yo, yak, yarn, yardstick, yolk

"q"
quail, quilt, queen, question mark, quarter (coin), quotes

"ch"
church, chick, chocolate, chimney, cherries, chipmunk, chain, cheese, checkers

"th"
thistle, thermometer, thimble, thorn

"sh"
sheep, shovel, ship, shoe, shell, shirt

After mastering sound-letter correspondence, the child is shown how to break spoken words into their main parts and endings. For example, "man" is broken into the sounds of "ma" and "-n." In this way, the sounds are associated with their letters and the child begins to understand the structure of words, thus learning how to decode new ones.

Regularly spelled words with short a are taught first, then proceeding to words with the short vowels of i, o, u, and e. Phrases and sentences are developed from these words, after the child has learned to read them.

Gould encourages the use of pictures, objects, letter cards, word cards, home-made books, and games for teaching with this method. Learning materials and books are available for parents who might want to purchase them.[131]

Wood Smethurst also describes a modified linguistics approach similar to Gould's in his book, "Teaching Young Children to Read."[132] However, it begins by teaching the names of the letters, proceeds to letter-sound associations, and then to regularly spelled words. He suggests many ideas and games for using his program. He also includes

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[131]Stern, Catherine, Gould, Toni S., and Stern, Margaret B. (N.D.). The structural reading program. New York: Random House, Inc. Cited by Gould, op. cit., p. 163.

[132]Smethurst, op. cit.

in his book a buyer's guide, which would be especially helpful to parents who would rather purchase than make the learning aids.

3. Direct teaching/meaning emphasis path.

In this path, the parents or other instructors, deliberately set out to teach their children to read, by using a meaning emphasis approach, sometimes called a whole word or sight word approach. Whole words are introduced to children. They memorize them and experience right from the beginning that reading consists of acquiring meaning from printed material. After learning to read words, they progress to reading sentences and then to stories.[133]

The Doman method is perhaps the best-known whole word or "meaning emphasis" approach for preschool children.[134] The first step is to make three sets of word cards for the child to learn. The first set consists of the words "mommy" and "daddy" printed in red letters on separate cards, six inches high by twenty-four inches long. Doman says that the letters should be five inches by four inches and should be lower case. The second set consists of the

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[133] Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 89 - 90.

[134] Doman, Glenn (1964). How to teach your baby to read. New York: Random House.

"self vocabulary," twenty basic "self" words (See Table Two.) printed in red lower case letters on white cards five inches high and approximately twenty-four inches long. The red letters should be four inches high. The third set consists of the "home vocabulary," the basic words of the child's immediate world. These are subdivided into four smaller groups: family, objects, possessions, and doing (See Table Two.). The words should be printed in red lower case letters two inches high on white cards that are three inches high.

The words are taught to the child, beginning with the first set. "Mommy" is first shown and told to the child for about ten seconds at a time, a total of five times during the course of the day. On the second day, the same procedure is repeated twice, and then the child is asked what the word says.

If the child answers correctly, the parents should respond with great excitement and delight, giving hugs and verbal praise. If however, the child does not answer correctly, the parents should not show any disappointment in voice, manner, or facial expression. They should clearly and happily say that it is "mommy," and continue the procedure as on the first day. If the child has not learned the word after a week, Doman suggests putting the materials away for a while and trying again at a later time.

Table 2.

Materials Needed for the Doman Method.[135]

1. Set of two word cards, 6" high by 24" long, with the words "mommy" and "daddy" printed on them in red lower case letters. The letters should be 5" by 4" with approximately 1/2" between letters.

2. Set of 20 basic "self" words on white cards 5" high, approximately 24" long, in red lower case letters 4" high.

hand	leg	teeth	finger
knee	eye	belly	tongue
foot	ear	mouth	
head	arm	elbow	
nose		thumb	
hair			
lips			
toes			
shoulder			

3. Set of "home" vocabulary, or basic words of the child's immediate world, printed on white cards 3" high, in red lower case letters 2" high. The "home" vocabulary is divided into family, objects, possessions, and doing groups. Words should be added to or deleted from each group in order to reflect the child's own interests and family. The child's own name and other proper names should be included.

A. Family

mommy	daddy	brother
sister	dog	cat
fish	bird	baby

B. Objects (these are family owned objects)

chair	table	door
window	wall	bedroom
bathroom	kitchen	refrigerator
tv		

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[135] Doman, op. cit., pp. 107 - 140.

Table 2, Continued.

C. Possessions (objects that are personal to the child)

plate	spoon
cup	hat
shoes	ball
orange	pants
dress	pajamas

D. Doing

sitting	creeping
standing	walking
running	jumping
laughing	throwing
climbing	reading

4. Set of "sentence-structure" vocabulary, words taken from the first book that the child will learn to read. (See number 6.) The single-word cards should be 3" high, with black lower case words, 2" high.

5. Set of "structured-phrase" vocabulary, or large phrase cards, each card to contain the entire text of one page of the child's first reader. (See number 6.) The words should be printed in black lower case letters 1" high. The cards are to be punched and assembled into a book by the use of 1" loose-leaf rings.

6. A book using a limited vocabulary printed in black upper and lower case letters 1/4" high.

7. The alphabet on 4" by 4" cards with black upper and lower case letters 3" high.

Once "mommy" has been learned, "daddy" should be taught in the same way. Then both words are presented and if the child can differentiate between them, the parents can proceed to the next set of words. They should present only one word at a time and make sure their child can differentiate between all of the words before a new one is presented. They are encouraged to use any ideas they might have to make learning fun for the child.

After the "self" words have been mastered, the parents can proceed to each of the other sets of words listed in numbers one to three in Table Two. After all of these words have been learned, the next step is to select an easy book from which the child will learn to read. (See number six in Table Two.)

A new set of words should be made. These will be the "sentence-structure" vocabulary (Number four in Table Two), and should include all the words in the chosen book, even the ones the child already knows. They should be made with black lower case letters, two inches high on single-word cards, three inches high.

Another set of cards should be prepared, called the "structured-phrase" vocabulary. (See number five in Table Two.) Each of these cards should be large enough to contain all of the print on a single page of the chosen book. The words should be one inch high. There should be as many

cards as there are pages in the book. They should be punched and later assembled into a home-made book by the use of one inch loose-leaf rings.

The last teaching aid that will be required is a set of the lower case and upper case letters. These should be made three inches high in black print on cards that are four by four inches.

After the necessary materials have been prepared, the parents can proceed to the next step, teaching their child the "sentence-structure" vocabulary. The same procedure is followed as previously, except that after the words from a single page have been learned, they are put together for the child to read in a sentence.

Once they have all been mastered singly and together, the child is taught the "structured-phrase" vocabulary, again one card a day. As each card is read, it should be placed in the loose-leaf rings, thus forming a make-it-yourself book, and the previous pages should be reread by the child. Doman suggests that the last page contain a certificate for the parents' notes and a signature testifying to the date and age that the child completed reading this first book.

The next step is for the child to read the real book. The word print has been progressively made smaller to

accustom the child's eyes to small print. Doman suggests that if a problem develops from the smallness of the print, that additional materials of larger-sized print be prepared and used with the child for a while longer.

The last step is teaching the alphabet. Doman suggests that the parents are now expert teachers and should use whatever system and materials they think are wise to teach the alphabet.

In her book, "Reading in Early Childhood," Ragnhild Soderbergh tells how she used the Doman method successfully to teach her child to read in Swedish.[136] Felicity Hughes also used the Doman method, but supplemented it with phonics instruction, in teaching her daughter to read early.[137] Others who recommend a combined sight-word and phonics approach are Siegfried and Therese Engelmann,[138]

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[136] Soderbergh, Ragnhild (1977). Reading in early childhood, A linguistic study of a preschool child's gradual acquisition of reading ability. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

[137] Hughes, Felicity (1971). Reading and writing before school: The reading revolution at home and at school. London: Cape.

[138] Engelmann, Siegfried and Engelmann, Therese (1966). Give your child a superior mind. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 141.

and Fernando Mino-Garces.[139] Mino-Garces discusses the use of the Lado method, a sight word approach which first introduces easy words in very large letters covering entire pages that are eight and one-half by eleven inches.[140] He also discusses use of the Montessori method, which is a phonics approach.[141] George L. Stevens and R. C. Orem offer a strictly sight word approach in their book, "The Case for Early Reading."[142]

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[139] Mino-Garces, Fernando (1981). Early reading acquisition: Six psycholinguistic case studies. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

[140] Ibid., pp. 16 - 18.

[141] Ibid., pp. 19 - 23.

[142] Stevens, George L. and Orem, R. C. (1968). The case for early reading. St. Louis, MO: Warren H. Green. pp. 126 - 131.

Recommendations to Parents

Research has shown that children can and do learn to read early at home and that they may learn easiest during their early years. Parents who want to need not fear helping their children acquire early reading. The most important thing to remember is never to pressure the child in any way to learn to read.

Parents may wish to choose a direct teaching path or let the child initiate the learning by using the informal path. No matter what the choice is, they can start to develop reading readiness in their child right from birth. Following are some recommendations for developing reading readiness.

1. Provide a stimulating environment for your infant even from birth. This can be done by using colorfully designed sheets, by hanging a mobile above the crib, and by moving the baby to different areas of the home to enlarge the viewing and hearing background.[143] As the baby grows, the environment should be modified to allow for the increased needs of moving, exploring, and sensory stimulation.

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[143] Heater, Sandra Harvey (1980). Teaching preschool reading. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press. pp. 9 - 10.

2. Talk to your baby from the first moment you hold the little one in your arms. A soothing voice, as well as the warmth of the human touch is emotionally satisfying.[144] In addition, hearing your words and sentences will gradually help your child to develop a meaning vocabulary, and later a speaking and reading vocabulary.

3. Read to your child often. James E. Flood quotes the Bullock Report which advises that "The best way to prepare the very young child for reading is to hold him on your lap and read aloud to him stories he likes -- over and over again."[145] Heater says that by cuddling your child on your lap and reading, you create a warm and pleasant time for book sharing. At first the companionship and feeling of security are the most salient aspects of reading aloud to your infant, and these feelings carry over into a warm feeling in general about books and reading.[146] Smethurst

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[144] Heater, op. cit., p. 11.

[145] Department of Education and Science (1975). A language for life (The Bullock Report). London, England: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Cited by Flood, James E. (1977, May). Parental styles in reading episodes with young children. The Reading Teacher, 30 (8). pp. 864 - 867.

[146] Heater, op. cit., p. 16.

suggests reading at least twenty minutes daily, as long as the child is interested.[147]

Prereading books can help you decide which ones would be interesting and understandable to your child. "A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading" by Nancy Larrick[148] can also be an aid to selecting appropriate books.

4. Permit your child to observe you reading.[149] Studies have shown that parents of early readers usually read more than the average adult. Since children often tend to imitate adults, they can become motivated to read in this way.

5. Take time to talk with and listen to your child. Answer any questions about letters, words, sounds, etc. Both Durkin's[150] and Clark's[151] studies of early readers showed a high level of interaction between parents and

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[147] Smethurst, Wood (1975). Teaching young children to read at home. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 106.

[148] Larrick, Nancy (1975). A parent's guide to children's reading (4th ed.). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

[149] Heater, op. cit., p. 17.

[150] Durkin, Dolores (1966). Children who read early: Two longitudinal studies. New York: Teachers College Press. pp. 133 - 136.

[151] Clark, Margaret M. (1976). Young fluent readers (What can they teach us). London: Heinemann Educational Books. p. 43.

children. Parents were willing to involve themselves with their children and play with them even at the expense of delaying other activities.

6. Help your child to develop a positive self image and a positive image of the world.[152] Children who feel good about themselves and life in general are better able to accept new challenges and learning experiences.

7. Broaden your child's experiences.[153] A walk through the neighborhood, a trip to the store, visits to a park, zoo, farm, airport, museum can all increase knowledge and understanding of the world. Talking and reading about these kinds of experiences can be very rewarding.

8. Surround your child with books, newspapers, posters, magazines.[154] Your child may like to use record/book sets. Storybooks can be obtained from stores or borrowed from a library. Trips to the library can be very enjoyable for children as well as adults.

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[152] Engelmann, Siegfried and Engelmann, Therese (1966). Give your child a superior mind. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 95.

[153] Heater, op. cit., pp. 21 - 24.

[154] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 107.

9. Encourage your child to draw, scribble, and write. Have materials available such as paper, pencil, crayons, markers, chalk, and chalkboard.[155]

10. Play games involving basic reading skills: letter names, letter-sounds, words, etc. Educational toys and magnetic plastic letters can be useful.[156]

11. Point out words and letters on signs, billboards, television, labels, headlines, posters, etc. Your child may also be interested in the names of family members, friends, and others.[157]

12. Encourage your child to watch television programs such as Sesame Street and Electric Company.[158] Television viewing can be stimulating and educational, but you should exercise control over what programs your child watches and the length of viewing time per day.[159] Smethurst suggests a moderate amount of viewing time, up to one hour a day.

Parents who wish to directly teach their child to read may wonder when is the best time to begin. There are

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[155]Smethurst, op. cit., p. 107.

[156]Ibid.

[157]Ibid.

[158]Ibid.

[159]Heater, op. cit., p. 14.

varying opinions about this question. Doman believes that age two is the easiest time for the child to learn.[160] Heater suggests age two or two and a half.[161] However, Gould says that children of ages two and three are too young; she suggests beginning instruction at age four.[162] One mother of a gifted child thought it was a waste of time to try to teach her two-year-old to read.[163] The group studies have shown children beginning to read at ages three, four, and five.

There is no common agreement on the best age to begin reading instruction. However, Durkin suggests a simple way in which to tell when a child is ready to read: provide interesting opportunities to learn and see what happens.[164]

Following are suggestions to parents who wish to directly teach reading to their child.

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[160] Doman, Glenn (1964). How to teach your baby to read. New York: Random House. p. 104.

[161] Heater, op. cit., p. 34.

[162] Gould, Toni S. (1976). Home guide to early reading. New York: Walker and Co. pp. 92 - 93.

[163] Price, Eunice H. (1976, October). How thirty-seven gifted children learned to read. Reading Teacher, 30 (1). pp. 44 - 48.

[164] Durkin (1966), op. cit.

1. Follow the suggestions for promoting reading readiness on pages 93 - 97 of this paper.

2. Choose a method or methods with which you would feel comfortable and which you feel would be good for your child. Some are described in the preceding section of this paper. More information about the methods can be obtained from the books mentioned.

3. Prepare the necessary materials before the actual instruction.

4. Choose times for instruction when your child is well-rested and alert, and not involved in some other interesting activity.[165]

5. Present your instruction in the form of games. Make it fun and interesting. It should be fun for both you and your child. You can obtain ideas from books; but don't hesitate to use your own ideas as well. They may well be more exciting since you know your child better than anyone else does.

6. Keep the learning sessions short. Never work on reading unless your child wants to, and always quit when

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[165]Heater, op. cit., pp. 35 - 36.

your child wants to quit (preferably before the child wants to).[166]

7. Relax. Don't push your child to learn. You have no time tables to keep and no set amount of material that must be covered. Let your child set the pace.

8. Give your child lots of encouragement and praise. Show joy and excitement for any accomplishment. Verbal praise and hugs are recommended.[167]

9. Do not show disappointment or concern for lack of progress. Don't show anxiety for your child to learn or to be "right" in answers. Don't become tense or impatient.

If your child experiences difficulty, try to figure out why; then try to clear up the problem. Perhaps you are proceeding too rapidly, or perhaps your child has a special way of learning that you can discover.

If you're still not getting anywhere, take some time off from the program and don't even try to teach what has been so difficult. Concentrate on something enjoyable, such as reading aloud or making up stories. After you have been

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[166] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 108.

[167] Doman, op. cit., p. 112.

away from it for a while, try to come back for a fresh start and a fresh approach.[168]

10. Do not use emotional pressure of any kind to get your child to read, not by actions, words, or facial expressions. Children do not learn well under pressure, and it could cause many problems, emotional and otherwise. If you find yourself getting anxious and impatient and your child is not enjoying the reading instruction, it would be best to discontinue it.[169]

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[168] Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 108 - 111.

[169] Ibid., p. 111.

Implications of Early Reading

According to Smethurst, the arguments of early reading opponents contain four main objections:

> The possibility of physical and/or psychological harm to the child from early reading.
>
> The possibility of interference with the child's schoolwork.
>
> The inappropriate manner (high-pressure, boring, inexpert) of instruction given to young children.
>
> The fundamental inappropriateness of reading to the lives of young children.[170]

1. The possibility of physical and/or psychological harm to the child from early reading.

William Sheldon is one opponent who has shown concern with the effects early reading might have on physical development, emotional stability, and eye sight. He said that there is no conclusive evidence that early reading instruction will be both effective and free from physical and mental health hazards.[171]

Dr. Jules H. Shaw, a Boston ophthalmologist, has said that "The eyes of most children are physiologically ready

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[170] Smethurst, Wood (1975). Teaching young children to read at home. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 38.

[171] Durkin, Dolores and Sheldon, William D. (1963, November). Should the very young be taught to read? NEA Journal 52. pp. 20 - 24.

for reading at the age of twelve months."[172] Neither Smethurst,[173] Durkin,[174] nor Fowler,[175] who have researched early reading extensively, have found any evidence of negative physical aftereffects from early reading, including eye sight. They urge caution, however, because research could turn up evidence in the future. Smethurst suggests that parents who worry about possible physical difficulties talk to their child's pediatrician or ophthalmologist.

Smethurst warns that bad emotional or psychological aftereffects are possible, where parents pressure their children into learning to read.[176] Some children such as Velia reported by Fowler,[177] and Jonathan and Tina reported by Mino-Garces,[178] did experience emotional problems,

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[172] Shaw, Jules H. (1964, October). Vision and seeing skills of preschool children. The Reading Teacher, 18. pp. 33 - 36.

[173] Smethurst, op. cit., pp. 38, 100.

[174] Durkin, Dolores (1974). Teaching them to read (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. p. 138.

[175] Fowler, William (1962, March). Cognitive learning in infancy and early childhood. Psychological Bulletin, 59 (2). p. 140 (pp. 116 - 152).

[176] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 38.

[177] Fowler, op. cit., p. 141.

[178] Mino-Garces, Fernando (1981). Early reading acquisition: Six psycholinguistic case studies. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

which may or may not have been related to early reading instruction.

However, children who learn willingly through play, games, and voluntary teaching seem to learn well without negative aftereffects traceable to early reading. Parents are strongly urged not to use pressure in teaching their children to read early.

2. The possibility of interference with the child's schoolwork.

Boredom with school is the chief concern here. Smethurst,[179] Beck,[180] and Engelmann and Engelmann[181] all agree that this can be a problem. However, they add that in most schools a program is worked out for the child who is ahead of the other classmates. Early readers can be accommodated readily by placing them in a top reading group, by having them help other children, or by just giving them books and letting them read. According to studies, early readers do well in first grade and in later grades.

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[179] Smethurst, op. cit., p. 39.

[180] Beck, Joan (1967). How to raise a brighter child: The case for early learning. New York: Trident Press. p. 74.

[181] Engelmann, Siegfried and Engelmann, Therese (1966). Give your child a superior mind. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 17.

Research has not borne out the fears of boredom in early readers, though it may happen.

3. Inappropriate manner (high pressure, boring, inexpert) of instruction given to young children.

A traditional argument against early reading instruction has been that parents do not have the professional training to teach their children to read.[182] Research done by Terman,[183] Durkin,[184] Clark,[185] and others has shown that ordinary parents and even siblings have helped children acquire early reading. It is not always necessary for a professional to begin the instruction.

Objections to inappropriate methods, however, do seem altogether valid. Bettelheim's[186] and Sheldon's[187] concerns of boring drills and pressure on little children should be

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[182] Durkin (1974), op. cit., pp. 138 - 139.

[183] Terman, Lewis M. (1918, September). An experiment in infant education. The Journal of Applied Psychology, 2 (3). pp. 220 - 221.

[184] Durkin, Dolores (1966). Children who read early: Two longitudinal studies. New York: Teachers College Press.

[185] Clark, Margaret M. (1976). Young fluent readers (What can they teach us). London: Heinemann Educational Books.

[186] Bettelheim, Bruno (1966, September). The danger of teaching your baby to read. Ladies Home Journal, 83. pp. 33 - 40.

[187] Durkin and Sheldon, op. cit., p. 22.

taken into account. Little children do not learn well under pressure; and if learning to read is not fun and interesting to them, they may possibly come to dislike both reading and instruction in general. It would be better not to teach early reading than to force it upon children.

4. The fundamental inappropriateness of reading to the lives of young children.

Some opponents feel that the preschool years should be spent in developing social and sensory-motor skills, and not in reading skills. Bettelheim says that playing and being active are natural, but sitting still and learning to read are not natural to most children at an early preschool age.[188] Others argue that children taught to read early are "cheated out of childhood" and "pushed into learning."[189]

Early reading does not have to detract from socialization and play time but can be incorporated right into them. Children have a natural curiosity to learn during

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[188] Bettelheim, op. cit., p. 33.

[189] Ollila, Lloyd O. (1972). Pros and cons of teaching reading to four- and five-year-olds. In R. C. Aukerman (Ed.), Some persistent questions on beginning reading. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp. 53 - 61.

the early years and acquiring reading is one way of learning. If they are interested and want to learn, and if the right kinds of procedures are used, early reading can be very enjoyable and beneficial.

Conclusion

In early American education, children as young as age two learned to read early at home and in school. However, the belief soon arose among educators that children below the age of six years did not have the physical, emotional, or intellectual readiness necessary for reading. The belief also spread that parents were unqualified and unable to teach reading effectively. Thus, it became customary for schools to begin instruction in reading at the age of six and for parents not to get involved.

The trend has recently changed, however, as interest in early reading has been rekindled. Studies have shown that children can and do learn to read early, and that parents, even without professional training, have helped their children learn successfully.

The question now is whether or not early reading is advantageous. Durkin says that not enough research has been done to know.[190] The little research that exists has shown very good results. Some questions remain unanswered, but as Beck points out, "If you have a preschooler now, you can't wait a decade or more for research to answer the

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[190]Durkin, Dolores (1971, April). Early reading instruction -- Is it advantageous? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association, Atlantic City. 8 pp.

questions beyond any argument."[191] The findings to date show early reading to be highly beneficial to children, and not harmful. Parents who want to help their children acquire early reading need not fear trying to do so. The most important thing to remember is to keep the instruction fun and interesting, and never to pressure the child into learning to read. Any of the methods which have been described can be used to help the child acquire early reading at home.

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[191] Beck, op. cit., p. 179.

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